

THE TRAGIC MUSE

HENRY JAMES



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VOL. I.



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BY  
HENRY JAMES

*IN THREE VOLUMES*

VOL. I.

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## I.

THE people of France have made it no secret that those of England, as a general thing, are, to their perception, an inexpressive and speechless race, perpendicular and unsociable, unaddicted to enriching any bareness of contact with verbal or other embroidery. This view might have derived encouragement, a few years ago, in Paris, from the manner in which four persons sat together in silence, one fine day about noon, in the garden, as it is called, of the Palais de l'Industrie—the central court of the great glazed bazaar where, among plants and parterres, gravelled walks and thin fountains, are ranged the figures and groups, the monuments and busts, which form, in the annual exhibition of the Salon, the department of statuary. The spirit of observation is naturally high at the Salon, quickened by a thousand artful or artless appeals, but no particular tension of the visual sense would have been required to embrace the character of the four persons in question. As a solicitation of the eye on definite grounds, they too constituted a successful plastic fact; and

even the most superficial observer would have perceived them to be striking products of an insular neighbourhood, representatives of that tweed-and-waterproof class with which, on the recurrent occasions when the English turn out for a holiday—Christmas and Easter, Whitsuntide and the autumn—Paris besprinkles itself at a night's notice. They had about them the indefinable professional look of the British traveller abroad; that air of preparation for exposure, material and moral, which is so oddly combined with the serene revelation of security and of persistence, and which excites, according to individual susceptibility, the ire or the admiration of foreign communities. They were the more unmistakable as they illustrated very favourably the energetic race to which they had the honour to belong. The fresh, diffused light of the Salon made them clear and important; they were finished productions, in their way, and ranged there motionless, on their green bench, they were almost as much on exhibition as if they had been hung on the line.

Three ladies and a young man, they were obviously a family—a mother, two daughters and a son—a circumstance which had the effect at once of making each member of the group doubly typical and of helping to account for their fine taciturnity. They were not, with each other, on terms of ceremony, and moreover they were probably fatigued with their course among the pictures, the rooms on the upper floor. Their attitude, on the part of visitors who had superior features, even if they might appear to some passers-by to have neglected a fine opportunity for completing these features with an expression, was after all a kind of tribute to the state of

exhaustion, of bewilderment, to which the genius of France is still capable of reducing the proud.

*"En v'la des abrutis!"* more than one of their fellow-gazers might have been heard to exclaim; and certain it is that there was something depressed and discouraged in this interesting group, who sat looking vaguely before them, not noticing the life of the place, somewhat as if each had a private anxiety. A very close observer would have guessed that though on many questions they were closely united, this present anxiety was not the same for each. If they looked grave, moreover, this was doubtless partly the result of their all being dressed in mourning, as if for a recent bereavement. The eldest of the three ladies had indeed a face of a fine austere mould, which would have been moved to gaiety only by some force more insidious than any she was likely to recognize in Paris. Cold, still and considerably worn, it was neither stupid nor hard, but it was firm, narrow and sharp. This competent matron, acquainted evidently with grief, but not weakened by it, had a high forehead, to which the quality of the skin gave a singular polish—it glittered even when seen at a distance; a nose which achieved a high, free curve; and a tendency to throw back her head and carry it well above her, as if to disengage it from the possible entanglements of the rest of her person. If you had seen her walk you would have perceived that she trod the earth in a manner suggesting that in a world where she had long since discovered that one couldn't have one's own way, one could never tell what annoying aggression might take place, so that it was well, from hour to hour, to save what one could. Lady



Agnes saved her head, her white triangular forehead, over which her closely crinkled flaxen hair, reproduced in different shades in her children, made a sort of looped silken canopy, like the marquee at a garden-party. Her daughters were tall, like herself—that was visible even as they sat there—and one of them, the younger evidently, was very pretty: a straight, slender, gray-eyed English girl, with a “good” figure and a fresh complexion. The sister, who was not pretty, was also straight and slender and gray-eyed. But the gray, in this case, was not so pure, nor were the slenderness and the straightness so maidenly. The brother of these young ladies had taken off his hat, as if he felt the air of the summer day heavy in the great pavilion. He was a lean, strong, clear-faced youth, with a straight nose and light-brown hair, which lay continuously and profusely back from his forehead, so that to smooth it from the brow to the neck but a single movement of the hand was required. I cannot describe him better than by saying that he was the sort of young Englishman who looks particularly well abroad, and whose general aspect—his inches, his limbs, his friendly eyes, the modulation of his voice, the cleanness of his flesh-tints and the fashion of his garments—excites on the part of those who encounter him in far countries on the ground of a common speech a delightful sympathy of race. This sympathy is sometimes qualified by an apprehension of undue literalness, but it almost revels as soon as such a danger is dispelled. We shall see quickly enough how accurate a measure it might have taken of Nicholas Dormer. There was food for suspicion, perhaps, in the wandering blankness that sat at moments in his eyes,

as if he had no attention at all, not the least in the world, at his command ; but it is no more than just to add, without delay, that this discouraging symptom was known, among those who liked him, by the indulgent name of dreaminess. For his mother and sisters, for instance, his dreaminess was notorious. He is the more welcome to the benefit of such an interpretation as there is always held to be something engaging in the combination of the muscular and the musing, the mildness of strength.

After some time—a period during which these good people might have appeared to have come, individually, to the Palais de l'Industrie much less to see the works of art than to think over their domestic affairs—the young man, rousing himself from his reverie, addressed one of the girls.

“I say, Biddy, why should we sit moping here all day? Come and take a turn about with me.”

His younger sister, while he got up, leaned forward a little, looking round her, but she gave, for the moment, no further sign of complying with his invitation.

“Where shall we find you, then, if Peter comes?” inquired the other Miss Dormer, making no movement at all.

“I dare say Peter won't come. He'll leave us here to cool our heels.”

“Oh, Nick, dear!” Biddy exclaimed in a sweet little voice of protest. It was plainly her theory that Peter would come, and even, a little, her apprehension that she might miss him should she quit that spot.

“We shall come back in a quarter of an hour. Really, I must look at these things,” Nick declared, turning his face to

a marble group which stood near them, on the right—a man, with the skin of a beast round his loins, tussling with a naked woman in some primitive effort of courtship or capture.

Lady Agnes followed the direction of her son's eyes, and then observed :

"Everything seems very dreadful. I should think Biddy had better sit still. Hasn't she seen enough horrors up above?"

"I dare say that if Peter comes Julia will be with him," the elder girl remarked irrelevantly.

"Well, then, he can take Julia about. That will be more proper," said Lady Agnes.

"Mother, dear, she doesn't care'a rap about art. It's a fearful bore looking at fine things with Julia," Nick rejoined.

"Won't you go with him, Grace?" said Biddy, appealing to her sister.

"I think she has awfully good taste!" Grace exclaimed, not answering this inquiry.

"*Don't* say nasty things about her!" Lady Agnes broke out, solemnly, to her son, after resting her eyes on him a moment with an air of reluctant reprobation.

"I say nothing but what she'd say herself," the young man replied. "About some things she has very good taste, but about this kind of thing she has no taste at all."

"That's better, I think," said Lady Agnes, turning her eyes again to the "kind of thing" that her son appeared to designate.

"She's awfully clever—awfully!" Grace went on, with decision.

"Awfully, awfully," her brother repeated, standing in front of her and smiling down at her.

"You *are* nasty, Nick. You know you are," said the young lady, but more in sorrow than in anger.

Biddy got up at this, as if the accusatory tone prompted her to place herself generously at his side. "Mightn't you go and order lunch, in that place, you know?" she asked of her mother. "Then we would come back when it was ready."

"My dear child, I can't order lunch," Lady Agnes replied, with a cold impatience which seemed to intimate that she had problems far more important than those of victualling to contend with.

"I mean Peter, if he comes. I am sure he's up in everything of that sort."

"Oh, hang Peter!" Nick exclaimed. "Leave him out of account, and *do* order lunch, mother; but not cold beef and pickles."

"I must say—about him—you're not nice," Biddy ventured to remark to her brother, hesitating, and even blushing, a little.

"You make up for it, my dear," the young man answered, giving her chin—a very charming, rotund little chin—a friendly whisk with his forefinger.

"I can't imagine what you've got against him," her ladyship murmured, gravely.

"Dear mother, it's a disappointed fondness," Nick argued. "They won't answer one's notes; they won't let one know where they are nor what to expect. 'Hell has no fury like a woman scorned;' nor like a man either."

"Peter has such a tremendous lot to do—it's a very busy time at the Embassy; there are sure to be reasons," Biddy explained, with her pretty eyes.

"Reasons enough, no doubt!" said Lady Agnes, who accompanied these words with an ambiguous sigh, however, as if in Paris even the best reasons would naturally be bad ones.

"Doesn't Julia write to you, doesn't she answer you the very day?" Grace inquired, looking at Nick as if she were the courageous one.

He hesitated a moment, returning her glance with a certain severity. "What do you know about my correspondence? No doubt I ask too much," he went on; "I am so attached to them. Dear old Peter, dear old Julia!"

"She's younger than you, my dear!" cried the elder girl, still resolute.

"Yes, nineteen days."

"I'm glad you know her birthday."

"She knows yours; she always gives you something," Lady Agnes resumed, to her son.

"Her taste is good *then*, isn't it, Nick?" Grace Dormer continued.

"She makes charming presents; but, dear mother, it isn't *her* taste. It's her husband's."

"Her husband's?"

"The beautiful objects of which she disposes so freely are the things he collected, for years, laboriously, devotedly, poor man!"

"She disposes of them to you, but not to others," said Lady

Agnes. "But that's all right," she added, as if this might have been taken for a complaint of the limitations of Julia's bounty. "She has to select, among so many, and that's a proof of taste," her ladyship went on.

"You can't say she doesn't choose lovely ones," Grace remarked to her brother, in a tone of some triumph.

"My dear, they are all lovely. George Dallow's judgment was so sure, he was incapable of making a mistake," Nicholas Dormer returned.

"I don't see how you can talk of him; he was dreadful," said Lady Agnes.

"My dear, if he was good enough for Julia to marry, he is good enough for one to talk of."

"She did him a great honour."

"I dare say; but he was not unworthy of it. No such intelligent collection of beautiful objects has been made in England in our time."

"You think too much of beautiful objects," returned her ladyship.

"I thought you were just now implying that I thought too little."

"It's very nice—his having left Julia so well off," Biddy interposed, soothingly, as if she foresaw a tangle.

"He treated her *en grand seigneur*, absolutely," Nick went on.

"He used to look greasy, all the same," Grace Dormer pursued, with a kind of dull irreconcilability. "His name ought to have been Tallow."

"You are not saying what Julia would like, if that's what you are trying to say," her brother remarked.



"Don't be vulgar, Grace," said Lady Agnes.

"I know Peter Sherringham's birthday!" Biddy broke out innocently, as a pacific diversion. She had passed her hand into her brother's arm, to signify her readiness to go with him, while she scanned the remoter portions of the garden as if it had occurred to her that to direct their steps in some such sense might after all be the shorter way to get at Peter.

"He's too much older than you, my dear," Grace rejoined, discouragingly.

"That's why I've noticed it—he's thirty-four. Do you call that too old? I don't care for slobbering infants!" Biddy cried.

"Don't be vulgar," Lady Agnes enjoined again.

"Come, Bid, we'll go and be vulgar together; for that's what we are, I'm afraid," her brother said to her. "We'll go and look at all these low works of art."

"Do you really think it's necessary to the child's development?" Lady Agnes demanded, as the pair turned away. Nicholas Dormer was struck as by a kind of challenge, and he paused, lingering a moment, with his little sister on his arm. "What we've been through this morning in this place, and what you've paraded before our eyes—the murders, the tortures, all kinds of disease and indecency!"

Nick looked at his mother as if this sudden protest surprised him, but as if also there were lurking explanations of it which he quickly guessed. Her resentment had the effect not so much of animating her cold face as of making it colder, less expressive, though visibly prouder. "Ah, dear mother, don't do the British matron!" he exclaimed, good-humouredly.



"British matron is soon said ! I don't know what they are coming to."

"How odd that you should have been struck only with the disagreeable things, when, for myself, I have felt it to be the most interesting, the most suggestive morning I have passed for ever so many months !"

"Oh, Nick, Nick !" Lady Agnes murmured, with a strange depth of feeling.

"I like them better in London—they are much less unpleasant," said Grace Dormer.

"They are things you can look at," her ladyship went on. "We certainly make the better show."

"The subject doesn't matter ; it's the treatment, the treatment !" Biddy announced, in a voice like the tinkle of a silver bell.

"Poor little Bid !" her brother cried, breaking into a laugh.

"How can I learn to model, mamma dear, if I don't look at things and if I don't study them ?" the girl continued.

This inquiry passed unheeded, and Nicholas Dormer said to his mother, more seriously, but with a certain kind explicitness, as if he could make a particular allowance : "This place is an immense stimulus to me ; it refreshes me, excites me, it's such an exhibition of artistic life. It's full of ideas, full of refinements ; it gives one such an impression of artistic experience. They try everything, they feel everything. While you were looking at the murders, apparently, I observed an immense deal of curious and interesting work. There are too many of them, poor devils ; so many who must make their way, who must attract attention. Some of them can only

*taper fort*, stand on their heads, turn summersaults or commit deeds of violence, to make people notice them. After that, no doubt, a good many will be quieter. But I don't know; to-day I'm in an appreciative mood—I feel indulgent even to them: they give me an impression of intelligence, of eager observation. All art is one—remember that, Biddy, dear,” the young man continued, looking down at his sister with a smile. “It's the same great, many-headed effort, and any ground that's gained by an individual, any spark that's struck in any province, is of use and of suggestion to all the others. We are all in the same boat.”

“‘We,’ do you say, my dear? Are you really setting up for an artist?” Lady Agnes asked.

Nick hesitated a moment. “I was speaking for Biddy!”

“But you *are* one, Nick—you are!” the girl cried.

Lady Agnes looked for an instant as if she were going to say once more “Don't be vulgar!” But she suppressed these words, if she had intended them, and uttered others, few in number and not completely articulate, to the effect that she hated talking about art. While her son spoke she had watched him as if she failed to follow him; yet something in the tone of her exclamation seemed to denote that she had understood him only too well.

“We are all in the same boat,” Biddy repeated, smiling at her.

“Not me, if you please!” Lady Agnes replied. “It's horrid, messy work, your modelling.”

“Ah, but look at the results!” said the girl, eagerly, glancing about at the monuments in the garden as if in

regard even to them she were, through that unity of art that her brother had just proclaimed, in some degree an effective cause.

"There's a great deal being done here—a real vitality," Nicholas Dormer went on, to his mother, in the same reasonable, informing way. "Some of these fellows go very far."

"They do, indeed!" said Lady Agnes.

"I'm fond of young schools, like this movement in sculpture," Nick remarked, with his slightly provoking serenity.

"They're old enough to know better!"

"Mayn't I look, mamma? It *is* necessary to my development," Biddy declared.

"You may do as you like," said Lady Agnes, with dignity.

"She ought to see good work, you know," the young man went on.

"I leave it to your sense of responsibility." This statement was somewhat majestic, and for a moment, evidently, it tempted Nick, almost provoked him, or at any rate suggested to him an occasion to say something that he had on his mind. Apparently, however, he judged the occasion on the whole not good enough, and his sister Grace interposed with the inquiry—

"Please, mamma, are we *never* going to lunch?"

"Ah, mother, mother!" the young man murmured, in a troubled way, looking down at Lady Agnes with a deep fold in his forehead.

For her, also, as she returned his look, it seemed an occasion; but with this difference, that she had no hesitation in taking advantage of it. She was encouraged by his slight embarrassment; for ordinarily Nick was not embarrassed. "You used

to have so much," she went on ; " but sometimes I don't know what has become of it—it seems all, *all* gone !"

" Ah, mother, mother !" he exclaimed again, as if there were so many things to say that it was impossible to choose. But this time he stepped closer, bent over her, and, in spite of the publicity of their situation, gave her a quick, expressive kiss. The foreign observer whom I took for granted in beginning to sketch this scene would have had to admit that the rigid English family had, after all, a capacity for emotion. Grace Dormer, indeed, looked round her to see if at this moment they were noticed. She discovered with satisfaction that they had escaped.

## II.

NICK DORMER walked away with Biddy, but he had not gone far before he stopped in front of a clever bust, where his mother, in the distance, saw him playing in the air with his hand, carrying out by this gesture, which presumably was applause, some critical remark he had made to his sister. Lady Agnes raised her glass to her eyes by the long handle to which rather a clanking chain was attached, perceiving that the bust represented an ugly old man with a bald head; at which her ladyship indefinitely sighed, though it was not apparent in what way such an object could be detrimental to her daughter. Nick passed on, and quickly paused again; this time, his mother discerned, it was before the marble image of a grimacing woman. Presently she lost sight of him; he wandered behind things, looking at them all round.

"I ought to get plenty of ideas for my modelling, oughtn't I, Nick?" his sister inquired of him, after a moment.

"Ah, my poor child, what shall I say?"

"Don't you think I have any capacity for ideas?" the girl continued, ruefully.

"Lots of them, no doubt. But the capacity for applying them, for putting them into practice—how much of that have you?"

"How can I tell till I try?"

"What do you mean by trying, Biddy dear?"

"Why, you know—you've seen me."

"Do you call that trying?" her brother asked, smiling at her.

"Ah, Nick!" murmured the girl, sensitively. Then, with more spirit, she went on: "And please, what do you?"

"Well, this, for instance;" and her companion pointed to another bust—a head of a young man, in terra-cotta, at which they had just arrived; a modern young man, to whom, with his thick neck, his little cap and his wide ring of dense curls, the artist had given the air of a Florentine of the time of Lorenzo.

Biddy looked at the image a moment. "Ah, that's not trying; that's succeeding."

"Not altogether; it's only trying seriously."

"Well, why shouldn't I be serious?"

"Mother wouldn't like it. She has inherited the queer old superstition that art is pardonable only so long as it's bad—so long as it's done at odd hours, for a little distraction, like a game of tennis or of whist. The only thing that can justify it, the effort to carry it as far as one can (which you can't do without time and singleness of purpose), she regards as just the dangerous, the criminal element. It's the oddest hind-part-before view, the drollest immorality."

"She doesn't want one to be professional," Biddy remarked, as if she could do justice to every system.

"Better leave it alone, then: there are duffers enough."

"I don't want to be a duffer," Biddy said. "But I thought you encouraged me."



"So I did, my poor child. It was only to encourage myself."

"With your own work—your painting?"

"With my futile, my ill-starred endeavours. Union is strength; so that we might present a wider front, a larger surface of resistance."

Biddy was silent a moment, while they continued their tour of observation. She noticed how her brother passed over some things quickly, his first glance sufficing to show him whether they were worth another, and recognized in a moment the figures that had something in them. His tone puzzled her, but his certainty of eye impressed her, and she felt what a difference there was yet between them—how much longer, in every case, she would have taken to discriminate. She was aware that she could rarely tell whether a picture was good or bad until she had looked at it for ten minutes; and modest little Biddy was compelled privately to add, "And often not even then." She was mystified, as I say (Nick was often mystifying—it was his only fault), but one thing was definite: her brother was exceedingly clever. It was the consciousness of this that made her remark at last: "I don't so much care whether or no I please mamma, if I please you."

"Oh, don't lean on me. I'm a wretched broken reed. I'm no use *really*!" Nick Dormer exclaimed.

"Do you mean you're a duffer?" Biddy asked, alarmed.

"Frightful, frightful!"

"So that you mean to give up your work—to let it alone, as you advise *me*?"

"It has never been my work, Biddy. If it had, it would be different. I should stick to it."



“And you *won't* stick to it?” the girl exclaimed, standing before him, open-eyed.

Her brother looked into her eyes a moment, and she had a compunction; she feared she was indiscreet and was worrying him. “Your questions are much simpler than the elements out of which my answer should come.”

“A great talent—what is simpler than that?”

“One thing, dear Biddy: no talent at all!”

“Well, yours is so real, you can't help it.”

“We shall see, we shall see,” said Nicholas Dormer. “Let us go look at that big group.”

“We shall see if it's real?” Biddy went on, as she accompanied him.

“No; we shall see if I can't help it. What nonsense Paris makes one talk!” the young man added, as they stopped in front of the composition. This was true, perhaps, but not in a sense which he found himself tempted to deplore. The present was far from being his first visit to the French capital: he had often quitted England, and usually made a point of “putting in,” as he called it, a few days there on the outward journey to the Continent or on the return; but on this occasion the emotions, for the most part agreeable, attendant upon a change of air and of scene had been more punctual and more acute than for a long time before, and stronger the sense of novelty, refreshment, amusement, of manifold suggestions looking to that quarter of thought to which, on the whole, his attention was apt most frequently, though not most confessedly, to stray. He was fonder of Paris than most of his countrymen, though not so fond,

perhaps, as some other captivated aliens: the place had always had the power of quickening sensibly the life of reflection and of observation within him. It was a good while since the reflections engendered by his situation there had been so favourable to the city by the Seine; a good while, at all events, since they had ministered so to excitement, to exhilaration, to ambition, even to a restlessness which was not prevented from being agreeable by the nervous quality in it. Dormer could have given the reason of this unwonted glow; but his preference was very much to keep it to himself. Certainly, to persons not deeply knowing, or at any rate not deeply curious, in relation to the young man's history, the explanation might have seemed to beg the question, consisting as it did of the simple formula that he had at last come to a crisis. Why a crisis—what was it, and why had he not come to it before? The reader shall learn these things in time, if he care enough for them.

For several years Nicholas Dormer had not omitted to see the Salon, which the general voice, this season, pronounced not particularly good. None the less, it was the exhibition of this season that, for some cause connected with his "crisis," made him think fast, produced that effect which he had spoken of to his mother as a sense of artistic life. The precinct of the marbles and bronzes appealed to him especially to-day; the glazed garden, not florally rich, with its new productions alternating with perfunctory plants and its queer damp smell, partly the odour of plastic clay, of the studios of sculptors, spoke to him with the voice of old associations, of other visits, of companionships that were closed—an insinuating

eloquence which was at the same time, somehow, identical with the general sharp contagion of Paris. There was youth in the air, and a multitudinous newness, for ever reviving, and the diffusion of a hundred talents, ingenuities, experiments. The summer clouds made shadows on the roof of the great building; the white images, hard in their crudity, spotted the place with provocations; the rattle of plates at the restaurant sounded sociable in the distance, and our young man congratulated himself more than ever that he had not missed the exhibition. He felt that it would help him to settle something. At the moment he made this reflection his eye fell upon a person who appeared—just in the first glimpse—to carry out the idea of help. He uttered a lively ejaculation, which, however, in its want of finish, Biddy failed to understand; so pertinent, so relevant and congruous, was the other party to this encounter.

The girl's attention followed her brother's, resting with his on a young man who faced them without seeing them, engaged as he was in imparting to two persons who were with him his ideas about one of the works exposed to view. What Biddy discerned was that this young man was fair and fat and of the middle stature; he had a round face and a short beard, and on his crown a mere reminiscence of hair, as the fact that he carried his hat in his hand permitted it to be observed. Bridget Dormer, who was quick, estimated him immediately as a gentleman, but a gentleman unlike any other gentleman she had ever seen. She would have taken him for a foreigner, but that the words proceeding from his mouth reached her ear and imposed themselves as a rare variety of English. It was

not that a foreigner might not have spoken excellent English, nor yet that the English of this young man was not excellent. It had, on the contrary, a conspicuous and aggressive perfection, and Biddy was sure that no mere learner would have ventured to play such tricks with the tongue. He seemed to draw rich effects and wandering airs from it—to modulate and manipulate it as he would have done a musical instrument. Her view of the gentleman's companions was less operative, save that she made the rapid reflection that they were people whom in any country, from China to Peru, one would immediately have taken for natives. One of them was an old lady with a shawl; that was the most salient way in which she presented herself. The shawl was an ancient, voluminous fabric of embroidered cashmere, such as many ladies wore forty years ago in their walks abroad, and such as no lady wears to-day. It had fallen half off the back of the wearer, but at the moment Biddy permitted herself to consider her she gave it a violent jerk and brought it up to her shoulders again, where she continued to arrange and settle it, with a good deal of jauntiness and elegance, while she listened to the talk of the gentleman. Biddy guessed that this little transaction took place very frequently, and she was not unaware that it gave the old lady a droll, facetious, faded appearance, as if she were singularly out of step with the age. The other person was very much younger—she might have been a daughter—and had a pale face, a low forehead and thick, dark hair. What she chiefly had, however, Biddy rapidly discovered, was a pair of largely-gazing eyes. Our young friend was helped to the discovery by the

accident of their resting at this moment, for a little while—it struck Biddy as very long—on her own. Both of these ladies were clad in light, thin, scanty gowns, giving an impression of flowered figures and odd transparencies, and in low shoes, which showed a great deal of stocking and were ornamented with large rosettes. Biddy's slightly agitated perception travelled directly to their shoes: they suggested to her vaguely that the wearers were dancers—connected possibly with the old-fashioned exhibition of the shawl-dance. By the time she had taken in so much as this the mellifluous young man had perceived and addressed himself to her brother. He came forward with an extended hand. Nick greeted him and said it was a happy chance—he was uncommonly glad to see him.

“I never come across you—I don't know why,” Nick remarked, while the two, smiling, looked each other up and down, like men reunited after a long interval.

“Oh, it seems to me there's reason enough: our paths in life are so different.” Nick's friend had a great deal of manner, as was evinced by his fashion of saluting her without knowing her.

“Different, yes, but not so different as that. Don't we both live in London, after all, and in the nineteenth century?”

“Ah, my dear Dormer, excuse me: I don't live in the nineteenth century. *Jamais de la vie!*”

“Nor in London either?”

“Yes—when I'm not in Samarcand! But surely we've diverged since the old days. I adore what you burn; you burn what I adore.” While the stranger spoke he looked cheerfully, hospitably, at Biddy; not because it was she, she



easily guessed, but because it was in his nature to desire a second auditor—a kind of sympathetic gallery. Her life, somehow, was filled with shy people, and she immediately knew that she had never encountered any one who seemed so to know his part and recognize his cues.

“How do you know what I adore?” Nicholas Dormer inquired.

“I know well enough what you used to.”

“That’s more than I do myself ; there were so many things.”

“Yes, there are many things—many, many : that’s what makes life so amusing.”

“Do you find it amusing?”

“My dear fellow, *c’est à se tordre !* Don’t you think so? Ah, it was high time I should meet you—I see. I have an idea you need me.”

“Upon my word, I think I do!” Nick said, in a tone which struck his sister and made her wonder still more why, if the gentleman was so important as that, he didn’t introduce him.

“There are many gods, and this is one of their temples,” the mysterious personage went on. “It’s a house of strange idols—isn’t it?—and of some curious and unnatural sacrifices.”

To Biddy, as much as to her brother, this remark appeared to be offered ; but the girl’s eyes turned back to the ladies, who, for the moment, had lost their companion. She felt irresponsible and feared she should pass with this familiar cosmopolite for a stiff, scared English girl, which was not the type she aimed at ; but there seemed an interdiction even of ocular commerce so long as she had not a sign from Nick.

The elder of the strange women had turned her back and was looking at some bronze figure, losing her shawl again as she did so; but the younger stood where their escort had quitted her, giving all her attention to his sudden sociability with others. Her arms hung at her sides, her head was bent, her face lowered, so that she had an odd appearance of raising her eyes from under her brows; and in this attitude she was striking, though her air was unconciliatory, almost dangerous. Did it express resentment at having been abandoned for another girl? Biddy, who began to be frightened—there was a moment when the forsaken one resembled a tigress about to spring—was tempted to cry out that she had no wish whatever to appropriate the gentleman. Then she made the discovery that the young lady had a manner, almost as much as her cicerone, and the rapid induction that it perhaps meant no more than his. She only looked at Biddy from beneath her eyebrows, which were wonderfully arched, but there was a manner in the way she did it. Biddy had a momentary sense of being a figure in a ballet, a dramatic ballet—a subordinate, motionless figure, to be dashed at, to music, or capered up to. It would be a very dramatic ballad indeed if this young person were the heroine. She had magnificent hair, the girl reflected; and at the same moment she heard Nick say to his interlocutor: “You’re not in London—one can’t meet you there?”

“I drift, I float,” was the answer; “my feelings direct me—if such a life as mine may be said to have a direction. Where there’s anything to feel I try to be there!” the young man continued with his confiding laugh.



"I should like to get hold of you," Nick remarked.

"Well, in that case there would be something to feel. Those are the currents—any sort of personal relation—that govern my career."

"I don't want to lose you this time," Nick continued, in a manner that excited Biddy's surprise. A moment before, when his friend had said that he tried to be where there was anything to feel, she had wondered how he could endure him.

"Don't lose me, don't lose me!" exclaimed the stranger, with a countenance and a tone which affected the girl as the highest expression of irresponsibility that she had ever seen. "After all, why should you? Let us remain together, unless I interfere"—and he looked, smiling and interrogative, at Biddy, who still remained blank, only observing again that Nick forbore to make them acquainted. This was an anomaly, since he prized the gentleman so; but there could be no anomaly of Nick's that would not impose itself upon his younger sister.

"Certainly, I keep you," said Nick, "unless, on my side, I deprive those ladies—"

"Charming women, but it's not an indissoluble union. We meet, we communicate, we part! They are going—I'm seeing them to the door. I shall come back." With this Nick's friend rejoined his companions, who moved away with him, the strange, fine eyes of the girl lingering on Nick, as well as on Biddy, as they receded.

"Who is he—who are they?" Biddy instantly asked.

"He's a gentleman," Nick replied, unsatisfactorily, and even, as she thought, with a shade of hesitation. He spoke

as if she might have supposed he was not one ; and if he was really one why didn't he introduce him ? But Biddy would not for the world have put this question to her brother, who now moved to the nearest bench and dropped upon it, as if to wait for the other's return. No sooner, however, had his sister seated herself than he said : " See here, my dear, do you think you had better stay ? "

" Do you want me to go back to mother ? " the girl asked, with a lengthening visage.

" Well, what do you think ? " and Nick smiled down at her.

" Is your conversation to be about—about private affairs ? "

" No, I can't say that. But I doubt whether mother would think it the sort of thing that's ' necessary to your development. ' "

This assertion appeared to inspire Biddy with the eagerness with which again she broke out : " But who are they—who are they ? "

" I know nothing of the ladies. I never saw them before. The man's a fellow I knew very well at Oxford. He was thought immense fun there. We have diverged, as he says, and I had almost lost sight of him, but not so much as he thinks, because I've read him, and read him with interest. He has written a very clever book. "

" What kind of a book ? "

" A sort of a novel. "

" What sort of a novel ? "

" Well, I don't know—with a lot of good writing. " Biddy listened to this with so much interest that she thought it

illogical her brother should add: "I dare say Peter will have come, if you return to mother."

"I don't care if he has. Peter's nothing to me. But I'll go if you wish it."

Nick looked down at her again, and then said: "It doesn't signify. We'll all go."

"All?" Biddy echoed.

"He won't hurt us. On the contrary, he'll do us good."

This was possible, the girl reflected in silence, but none the less the idea struck her as courageous--the idea of their taking the odd young man back to breakfast with them and with the others, especially if Peter should be there. If Peter was nothing to her, it was singular she should have attached such importance to this contingency. The odd young man reappeared, and now that she saw him without his queer female appendages he seemed personally less unusual. He struck her, moreover, as generally a good deal accounted for by the literary character, especially if it were responsible for a lot of good writing. As he took his place on the bench Nick said to him, indicating her, "My sister Bridget," and then mentioned his name, "Mr. Gabriel Nash."

"You enjoy Paris—you are happy here?" Mr. Nash inquired, leaning over his friend to speak to the girl.

Though his words belonged to the situation, it struck her that his tone didn't, and this made her answer him more dryly than she usually spoke. "Oh, yes, it's very nice."

"And French art interests you? You find things here that please?"

"Oh, yes, I like some of them."

Mr. Nash looked at her with kind eyes. "I hoped you would say you like the Academy better."

"She would if she didn't think you expected it," said Nicholas Dormer.

"Oh, Nick!" Biddy protested.

"Miss Dormer is herself an English picture," Gabriel Nash remarked, smiling like a man whose urbanity was a solvent.

"That's a compliment, if you don't like them!" Biddy exclaimed.

"Ah, some of them, some of them; there's a certain sort of thing!" Mr. Nash continued. "We must feel everything, everything that we can. We are here for that."

"You do like English art, then?" Nick demanded, with a slight accent of surprise.

Mr. Nash turned his smile upon him. "My dear Dormer, do you remember the old complaint I used to make of you? You had formulas that were like walking in one's hat. One may see something in a case, and one may not."

"Upon my word," said Nick, "I don't know any one who was fonder of a generalization than you. You turned them off as the man at the street-corner distributes hand-bills."

"They were my wild oats. I've sown them all."

"We shall see that!"

"Oh, they're nothing now—a tame, scanty, homely growth. My only generalizations are my actions."

"We shall see *them*, then."

"Ah, excuse me. You can't see them with the naked eye. Moreover, mine are principally negative. People's actions, I

know, are, for the most part, the things they do, but mine are all the things I don't do. There are so many of those, so many, but they don't produce any effect. And then all the rest are shades—extremely fine shades.”

“Shades of behaviour?” Nick inquired, with an interest which surprised his sister; Mr. Nash's discourse striking her mainly as the twaddle of the under-world.

“Shades of impression, of appreciation,” said the young man, with his explanatory smile. “My only behaviour is my feelings.”

“Well, don't you show your feelings? You used to!”

“Wasn't it mainly those of disgust?” Nash asked. “Those operate no longer. I have closed that window.”

“Do you mean you like everything?”

“Dear me, no! But I look only at what I do like.”

“Do you mean that you have lost the faculty of displeasure?”

“I haven't the least idea. I never try it. My dear fellow,” said Gabriel Nash, “we have only one life that we know anything about: fancy taking it up with disagreeable impressions! When, then, shall we go in for the agreeable?”

“What do you mean by the agreeable?” Nick Dormer asked.

“Oh, the happy moments of our consciousness—the multiplication of those moments. We must save as many as possible from the dark gulf.”

Nick had excited a certain astonishment on the part of his sister, but it was now Biddy's turn to make him open his eyes a little. She raised her sweet voice and inquired of Mr. Nash—

“Don't you think there are any wrongs in the world—any abuses and sufferings?”

“Oh, so many, so many! That's why one must choose.”



"Choose to stop them, to reform them—isn't that the choice?" Biddy asked. "That's Nick's," she added, blushing and looking at this personage.

"Ah, our divergence—yes!" sighed Gabriel Nash. "There are all kinds of machinery for that—very complicated and ingenious. Your formulas, my dear Dormer, your formulas!"

"Hang 'em, I haven't got any!" Nick exclaimed.

"To me, personally, the simplest ways are those that appeal most," Mr. Nash went on. "We pay too much attention to the ugly; we notice it, we magnify it. The great thing is to leave it alone and encourage the beautiful."

"You must be very sure you get hold of the beautiful," said Nick.

"Ah, precisely, and that's just the importance of the faculty of appreciation. We must train our special sense. It is capable of extraordinary extension. Life's none too long for that."

"But what's the good of the extraordinary extension if there is no affirmation of it, if it all goes to the negative, as you say? Where are the fine consequences?" Dormer asked.

"In one's own spirit. One is one's self a fine consequence. That's the most important one we have to do with. I am a fine consequence," said Gabriel Nash.

Biddy rose from the bench at this, and stepped away a little, as if to look at a piece of statuary. But she had not gone far before, pausing and turning, she bent her eyes upon Mr. Nash with a heightened colour, an air of hesitation and the question, after a moment: "Are you an æsthete?"

"Ah, there's one of the formulas! That's walking in one's



hat! I've *no* profession, my dear young lady. I've no *état civil*. These things are a part of the complicated, ingenious machinery. As I say, I keep to the simplest way. I find that gives one enough to do. Merely to be is such a *métier*; to live is such an art; to feel is such a career!"

Bridget Dormer turned her back and examined her statue, and her brother said to his old friend: "And to write?"

"To write? Oh, I'll never do it again!"

"You have done it almost well enough to be inconsistent. That book of yours is anything but negative; it's complicated and ingenious."

"My dear fellow, I'm extremely ashamed of it," said Gabriel Nash.

"Ah, call yourself a bloated Buddhist and have done with it!" his companion exclaimed.

"Have done with it? I haven't the least desire for that. And why should one call one's self anything? One only deprives other people of their dearest occupation. Let me add that you don't *begin* to have an insight into the art of life till it ceases to be of the smallest consequence to you what you may be called. That's rudimentary."

"But if you go in for shades, you must also go in for names. You must distinguish," Dormer objected. "The observer is nothing without his categories, his types and varieties."

"Ah, trust him to distinguish!" said Gabriel Nash, sweetly. "That's for his own convenience; he has, privately, a terminology to meet it. That's one's style. But from the moment it's for the convenience of others, the signs have to be grosser, the shades begin to go. That's a deplorable hour! Literature,

you see, is for the convenience of others. It requires the most abject concessions. It plays such mischief with one's style that really I have had to give it up."

"And politics?" Nick Dormer asked.

"Well, what about them?" was Mr. Nash's reply, in a peculiar intonation, as he watched his friend's sister, who was still examining her statue. Biddy was divided between irritation and curiosity. She had interposed space, but she had not gone beyond ear-shot. Nick's question made her curiosity throb, especially in its second form, as a rejoinder to their companion's.

"That, no doubt you'll say, is still far more for the convenience of others—is still worse for one's style."

Biddy turned round in time to hear Mr. Nash exclaim: "It has simply nothing in life to do with shades! I can't say worse for it than that."

Biddy stepped nearer at this, and, drawing still further on her courage: "Won't mamma be waiting? Oughtn't we to go to luncheon?" she asked.

Both the young men looked up at her, and Mr. Nash remarked—

"You ought to protest! You ought to save him!"

"To save him?" said Biddy.

"He *had* a style; upon my word he had! But I've seen it go. I've read his speeches."

"You were capable of that?" Dormer demanded.

"For you, yes. But it was like listening to a nightingale in a brass band."

"I think they were beautiful," Biddy declared.

Her brother got up at this tribute, and Mr. Nash, rising too, said, with his bright colloquial air—

“But, Miss Dormer, he had eyes. He was made to see—to see all over, to see everything. There are so few like that.”

“I think he still sees,” Biddy rejoined, wondering a little why Nick didn’t defend himself.

“He sees his side, dear young lady. Poor man, fancy your having a ‘side’—you, you—and spending your days and your nights looking at it! I’d as soon pass my life looking at an advertisement on a hoarding.”

“You don’t see me some day a great statesman?” said Nick.

“My dear fellow, it’s exactly what I’ve a terror of.”

“Mercy! don’t you admire them?” Biddy cried.

“It’s a trade like another, and a method of making one’s way which society certainly condones. But when one can be something better!”

“Dear me, what *is* better?” Biddy asked.

The young man hesitated, and Nick, replying for him, said—

“Gabriel Nash is better! You must come and lunch with us. I must keep you—I must!” he added.

“We shall save him yet,” Mr. Nash observed genially to Biddy as they went; while the girl wondered still more what her mother would make of him.

### III.

AFTER her companions left her Lady Agnes rested for five minutes in silence with her elder daughter, at the end of which time she observed, "I suppose one must have food, at any rate," and, getting up, quitted the place where they had been sitting. "And where are we to go? I hate eating out-of-doors," she went on.

"Dear me, when one comes to Paris!" Grace rejoined, in a tone which appeared to imply that in so rash an adventure one must be prepared for compromises and concessions. The two ladies wandered to where they saw a large sign of "Buffet" suspended in the air, entering a precinct reserved for little white-clothed tables, straw-covered chairs and long-aproned waiters. One of these functionaries approached them with eagerness and with a "*Mesdames sont seules?*" receiving in return, from her ladyship, the slightly snappish announcement, "*Non; nous sommes beaucoup!*" He introduced them to a table larger than most of the others, and under his protection they took their places at it and began, rather languidly and vaguely, to consider the question of the repast. The waiter had placed a *carte* in Lady Agnes's hands, and she studied it, through her eye-glass, with a failure of interest, while he enumerated, with professional fluency, the resources of the

establishment and Grace looked at the people at the other tables. She was hungry and had already broken a morsel from a long glazed roll.

"Not cold beef and pickles, you know," she observed to her mother. Lady Agnes gave no heed to this profane remark, but she dropped her eye-glass and laid down the greasy document. "What does it signify? I dare say it's all nasty," Grace continued; and she added, inconsequently: "If Peter comes he's sure to be particular."

"Let him be particular to come, first!" her ladyship exclaimed, turning a cold eye upon the waiter.

"*Poulet chasseur, filets mignons, sauce béarnaise,*" the man suggested.

"You will give us what I tell you," said Lady Agnes, and she mentioned, with distinctness and authority, the dishes of which she desired that the meal should be composed. He interposed three or four more suggestions, but as they produced absolutely no impression on her he became silent and submissive, doing justice, apparently, to her ideas. For Lady Agnes had ideas; and though it had suited her humour, ten minutes before, to profess herself helpless in such a case, the manner in which she imposed them upon the waiter as original, practical and economical showed the high, executive woman, the mother of children, the daughter of earls, the consort of an official, the dispenser of hospitality, looking back upon a life-time of luncheons. She carried many cares, and the feeding of multitudes (she was honourably conscious of having fed them decently, as she had always done everything) had ever been one of them. "Everything is absurdly dear," she hinted



to her daughter, as the waiter went away. To this remark Grace made no answer. She had been used, for a long time back, to hearing that everything was very dear; it was what one always expected. So she found the case herself, but she was silent and inventive about it.

Nothing further passed, in the way of conversation with her mother, while they waited for the latter's orders to be executed, till Lady Agnes reflected, audibly: "He makes me unhappy, the way he talks about Julia."

"Sometimes I think he does it to torment one. One can't mention her!" Grace responded.

"It's better not to mention her, but to leave it alone."

"Yet he never mentions her of himself."

"In some cases that is supposed to show that people like people—though of course something more than that is required," Lady Agnes continued to meditate. "Sometimes I think he's thinking of her; then at others I can't fancy *what* he's thinking of."

"It would be awfully suitable," said Grace, biting her roll.

Her mother was silent a moment, as if she were looking for some higher ground to put it upon. Then she appeared to find this loftier level in the observation: "Of course he must like her; he has known her always."

"Nothing can be plainer than that she likes him," Grace declared.

"Poor Julia!" Lady Agnes exclaimed; and her tone suggested that she knew more about that than she was ready to state.

"It isn't as if she wasn't clever and well read," her daughter



went on. "If there were nothing else there would be a reason in her being so interested in politics, in everything that he is."

"Ah, what he is—that's what I sometimes wonder!"

Grace Dormer looked at her mother a moment. "Why, mother, isn't he going to be like papa?" She waited for an answer that didn't come; after which she pursued: "I thought you thought him so like him already."

"Well, I don't," said Lady Agnes, quietly.

"Who is, then? Certainly Percy isn't."

Lady Agnes was silent a moment. "There is no one like your father."

"Dear papa!" Grace exclaimed. Then, with a rapid transition: "It would be so jolly for all of us; she would be so nice to us."

"She is that already, in her way," said Lady Agnes, conscientiously, having followed the return, quick as it was. "Much good does it do her!" And she reproduced the note of her ejaculation of a moment before.

"It does her some, if one looks out for her. I do, and I think she knows it," Grace declared. "One can, at any rate, keep other women off."

"Don't meddle! you're very clumsy," was her mother's not particularly sympathetic rejoinder. "There are other women who are beautiful, and there are others who are clever and rich."

"Yes, but not all in one; that's what's so nice in Julia. Her fortune would be thrown in; he wouldn't appear to have married her for it."

"If he does, he won't," said Lady Agnes, a trifle obscurely.

"Yes, that's what's so charming. And he could do anything then, couldn't he?"

"Well, your father had no fortune, to speak of."

"Yes, but didn't Uncle Percy help him?"

"His wife helped him," said Lady Agnes.

"Dear mamma!" the girl exclaimed. "There's one thing," she added: "that Mr. Carteret will always help Nick."

"What do you mean by 'always'?"

"Why, whether he marries Julia or not."

"Things are not so easy," responded Lady Agnes. "It will all depend on Nick's behaviour. He can stop it to-morrow."

Grace Dormer stared; she evidently thought Mr. Carteret's beneficence a part of the scheme of nature. "How could he stop it?"

"By not being serious. It isn't so hard to prevent people giving you money."

"Serious?" Grace repeated. "Does he want him to be a prig, like Lord Egbert?"

"Yes, he does. And what he'll do for him he'll do for him only if he marries Julia."

"Has he told you?" Grace inquired. And then, before her mother could answer, she exclaimed: "I'm delighted at that!"

"He hasn't told me, but that's the way things happen." Lady Agnes was less optimistic than her daughter, and such optimism as she cultivated was a thin tissue, with a sense of things as they are showing through it. "If Nick becomes rich, Charles Carteret will make him more so. If he doesn't, he won't give him a shilling."

“Oh, mamma!” Grace protested.

“It’s all very well to say that in public life money isn’t necessary, as it used to be,” her ladyship went on, broodingly. “Those who say so don’t know anything about it. It’s always necessary.”

Her daughter was visibly affected by the gloom of her manner, and felt impelled to evoke, as a corrective, a more cheerful idea. “I dare say; but there’s the fact—isn’t there?—that poor papa had so little.”

“Yes, and there’s the fact that it killed him!”

These words came out with a strange, quick little flare of passion. They startled Grace Dormer, who jumped in her place and cried, “Oh, mother!” The next instant, however, she added, in a different voice, “Oh, Peter!” for, with an air of eagerness, a gentleman was walking up to them.

“How d’ye do, Cousin Agnes? How d’ye do, little Grace?” Peter Sherringham said, laughing and shaking hands with them; and three minutes later he was settled in his chair at their table, on which the first elements of the repast had been placed. Explanations, on one side and the other, were demanded and produced; from which it appeared that the two parties had been in some degree at cross-purposes. The day before Lady Agnes and her companions travelled to Paris, Sherringham had gone to London for forty-eight hours, on private business of the ambassador’s, arriving, on his return by the night-train, only early that morning. There had accordingly been a delay in his receiving Nick Dormer’s two notes. If Nick had come to the Embassy in person (he might have done him the honour to call), he would have learned

that the second secretary was absent. Lady Agnes was not altogether successful in assigning a motive to her son's neglect of this courteous form; she said: "I expected him, I wanted him, to go; and indeed, not hearing from you, he would have gone immediately—an hour or two hence, on leaving this place. But we are here so quietly, not to go out, not to seem to appeal to the ambassador. He said, 'Oh, mother, we'll keep out of it; a friendly note will do.' I don't know, definitely, what he wanted to keep out of, except it's anything like gaiety. The Embassy isn't gay, I know. But I'm sure his note was friendly, wasn't it? I dare say you'll see for yourself; he's different directly he gets abroad; he doesn't seem to care." Lady Agnes paused a moment, not carrying out this particular elucidation; then she resumed: "He said you would have seen Julia and that you would understand everything from her. And when I asked how she would know, he said, 'Oh, she knows everything!'"

"He never said a word to me about Julia," Peter Sherringham rejoined. Lady Agnes and her daughter exchanged a glance at this; the latter had already asked three times where Julia was, and her ladyship dropped that they had been hoping she would be able to come with Peter. The young man set forth that she was at that moment at an hotel in the Rue de la Paix, but had only been there since that morning: he had seen her before coming to the Champs Elysées. She had come up to Paris by an early train—she had been staying at Versailles, of all places in the world. She had been a week in Paris, on her return from Cannes (her stay *there* had been of nearly a month—fancy!) and then had gone out to Versailles

to see Mrs. Billinghamurst. Perhaps they would remember her, poor Dallow's sister. She was staying there to teach her daughters French (she had a dozen or two!) and Julia had spent three days with her. She was to return to England about the 25th. It would make seven weeks that she would have been away from town—a rare thing for her; she usually stuck to it so in summer.

“Three days with Mrs. Billinghamurst—how very good-natured of her!” Lady Agnes commented.

“Oh, they're very nice to her,” Sherringham said.

“Well, I hope so!” Grace Dormer qualified. “Why didn't you make her come here?”

“I proposed it, but she wouldn't.” Another eye-beam, at this, passed between the two ladies, and Peter went on: “She said you must come and see her, at the Hôtel de Hollande.”

“Of course we'll do that,” Lady Agnes declared. “Nick went to ask about her at the Westminster.”

“She gave that up; they wouldn't give her the rooms she wanted, her usual set.”

“She's delightfully particular!” Grace murmured. Then she added: “She *does* like pictures, doesn't she?”

Peter Sherringham stared. “Oh, I dare say. But that's not what she has in her head this morning. She has some news from London; she's immensely excited.”

“What has she in her head?” Lady Agnes asked.

“What's her news from London?” Grace demanded.

“She wants Nick to stand.”

“Nick to stand?” both the ladies cried.

“She undertakes to bring him in for Harsh. Mr. Pinks is



dead—the fellow, you know, that got the seat at the general election. He dropped down in London—disease of the heart, or something of that sort. Julia has her telegram, but I see it was in last night's papers."

"Imagine, Nick never mentioned it!" said Lady Agnes.

"Don't you know, mother?—abroad he only reads foreign papers."

"Oh, I know. I've no patience with him," her ladyship continued. "Dear Julia!"

"It's a nasty little place, and Pinks had a tight squeeze—107, or something of that sort; but if it returned a Liberal a year ago, very likely it will do so again. Julia, at any rate, *se fait forte*, as they say here, to put him in."

"I'm sure if she can she will," Grace reflected.

"Dear, dear Julia! And Nick can do something for himself," said the mother of this candidate.

"I have no doubt he can do anything," Peter Sherringham returned, good-naturedly. Then, "Do you mean in expenses?" he inquired.

"Ah, I'm afraid he can't do much in expenses, poor dear boy! And it's dreadful how little we can look to Percy."

"Well, I dare say you may look to Julia. I think that's her idea."

"Delightful Julia!" Lady Agnes ejaculated. "If poor Sir Nicholas could have known! Of course he must go straight home," she added.

"He won't like that," said Grace.

"Then he'll have to go without liking it."

"It will rather spoil *your* little excursion, if you've only



just come," Peter suggested; "and the great Biddy's, if she's enjoying Paris."

"We may stay, perhaps—with Julia to protect us," said Lady Agnes.

"Ah, she won't stay; she'll go over for her man."

"Her man?"

"The fellow that stands, whoever he is; especially if he's Nick." These last words caused the eyes of Peter Sherringham's companions to meet again, and he went on: "She'll go straight down to Harsh."

"Wonderful Julia!" Lady Agnes panted. "Of course Nick must go straight there, too."

"Well, I suppose he must see first if they'll have him."

"If they'll have him? Why, how can he tell till he tries?"

"I mean the people at headquarters, the fellows who arrange it."

Lady Agnes coloured a little. "My dear Peter, do you suppose there will be the least doubt of their 'having' the son of his father?"

"Of course it's a great name, Cousin Agnes—a very great name."

"One of the greatest, simply," said Lady Agnes, smiling.

"It's the best name in the world!" Grace Dormer subjoined.

"All the same it didn't prevent his losing his seat."

"By half a dozen votes: it was too odious!" her ladyship cried.

"I remember—I remember. And in such a case as that why didn't they immediately put him in somewhere else?"

"How one sees that you live abroad, Peter! There happens

to have been the most extraordinary lack of openings—I never saw anything like it—for a year. They’ve had their hand on him, keeping him all ready. I dare say they’ve telegraphed to him.”

“And he hasn’t told you?”

Lady Agnes hesitated. “He’s so odd when he’s abroad!”

“At home, too, he lets things go,” Grace interposed. “He does so little—takes no trouble.” Her mother suffered this statement to pass unchallenged, and she pursued, philosophically: “I suppose it’s because he knows he’s so clever”

“So he is, dear old boy. But what does he do, what has he been doing, in a positive way?”

“He has been painting.”

“Ah, not seriously!” Lady Agnes protested.

“That’s the worst way,” said Peter Sherringham. “Good things?”

Neither of the ladies made a direct response to this, but Lady Agnes said: “He has spoken repeatedly. They are always calling on him.”

“He speaks magnificently,” Grace attested.

“That’s another of the things I lose, living in far countries. And he’s doing the Salon now, with the great Biddy?”

“Just the things in this part. I can’t think what keeps them so long,” Lady Agnes rejoined. “Did you ever see such a dreadful place?”

Sherringham stared. “Aren’t the things good? I had an idea—”

“Good?” cried Lady Agnes. “They’re too odious, too wicked.”

"Ah," said Peter, laughing, "that's what people fall into, if they live abroad. The French oughtn't to live abroad."

"Here they come," Grace announced, at this point; "but they've got a strange man with them."

"That's a bore, when we want to talk!" Lady Agnes sighed.

Peter got up, in the spirit of welcome, and stood a moment watching the others approach. "There will be no difficulty in talking, to judge by the gentleman," he suggested; and while he remains so conspicuous our eyes may rest on him briefly. He was middling high and was visibly a representative of the nervous rather than of the phlegmatic branch of his race. He had an oval face, fine, firm features and a complexion that tended to the brown. Brown were his eyes, and women thought them soft; dark brown his hair, in which the same critics sometimes regretted the absence of a little undulation. It was perhaps to conceal this plainness that he wore it very short. His teeth were white; his moustache was pointed, and so was the small beard that adorned the extremity of his chin. His face expressed intelligence and was very much alive, and had the further distinction that it often struck superficial observers with a certain foreignness of cast. The deeper sort, however, usually perceived that it was English enough. There was an idea that, having taken up the diplomatic career and gone to live in strange lands, he cultivated the mask of an alien, an Italian or a Spaniard; of an alien in time, even—one of the wonderful ubiquitous diplomatic agents of the sixteenth century. In fact, it would have been impossible to be more modern than Peter Sherringham, and more of one's class

and one's country. But this did not prevent a portion of the community—Bridget Dormer, for instance—from admiring the hue of his cheek for its olive richness and his moustache and beard for their resemblance to those of Charles I. At the same time—she rather jumbled her comparisons—she thought he looked like a Titian.

#### IV.

PETER'S meeting with Nick was of the friendliest on both sides, involving a great many "dear fellows" and "old boys," and his salutation to the younger of the Miss Dormers consisted of the frankest "Delighted to see you, my dear Bid!" There was no kissing, but there was cousinship in the air, of a conscious, living kind, as Gabriel Nash no doubt quickly perceived, hovering for a moment outside the group. Biddy said nothing to Peter Sherringham, but there was no flatness in a silence which afforded such opportunities for a pretty smile. Nick introduced Gabriel Nash to his mother and to the other two as "a delightful old friend," whom he had just come across, and Sherringham acknowledged the act by saying to Mr. Nash, but as if rather less for his sake than for that of the presenter: "I have seen you very often before."

"Ah, repetition—recurrence: we haven't yet, in the study of how to live, abolished that clumsiness, have we?" Mr. Nash genially inquired. "It's a poverty in the supernumeraries that we don't pass once for all, but come round and cross again, like a procession at the theatre. It's a shabby economy that ought to have been managed better. The right thing would be just *one* appearance, and the procession, regardless of expense, forever and forever different."

The company was occupied in placing itself at table, so that the only disengaged attention, for the moment, was Grace's, to whom, as her eyes rested on him, the young man addressed these last words with a smile. "Alas, it's a very shabby idea, isn't it? The world isn't got up regardless of expense!"

Grace looked quickly away from him, and said to her brother: "Nick, Mr. Pinks is dead."

"Mr. Pinks?" asked Gabriel Nash, appearing to wonder where he should sit.

"The member for Harsh; and Julia wants you to stand," the girl went on.

"Mr. Pinks, the member for Harsh? What names to be sure!" Gabriel mused cheerfully, still unseated.

"Julia wants me? I'm much obliged to her!" observed Nicholas Dormer. "Nash, please sit by my mother, with Peter on her other side."

"My dear, it isn't Julia," Lady Agnes remarked, earnestly, to her son. "Every one wants you. Haven't you heard from your people? Didn't you know the seat was vacant?"

Nick was looking round the table, to see what was on it. "Upon my word I don't remember. What else have you ordered, mother?"

"There's some *bœuf braisé*, my dear, and afterwards some galantine. Here is a dish of eggs with asparagus-tips."

"I advise you to go in for it, Nick," said Peter Sherringham, to whom the preparation in question was presented.

"Into the eggs with asparagus-tips? *Donnez m'en, s'il vous plaît*. My dear fellow, how can I stand? how can I sit? Where's the money to come from?"



"The money? Why, from Jul—" Grace began, but immediately caught her mother's eye.

"Poor Julia, how you do work her!" Nick exclaimed. "Nash, I recommend the asparagus-tips. Mother, he's my best friend; do look after him."

"I have an impression I have breakfasted—I am not sure," Nash observed.

"With those beautiful ladies? Try again; you'll find out."

"The money can be managed; the expenses are very small and the seat is certain," Lady Agnes declared, not, apparently, heeding her son's injunction in respect to Nash.

"Rather—if Julia goes down!" her elder daughter exclaimed.

"Perhaps Julia won't go down!" Nick answered, humorously.

Biddy was seated next to Mr. Nash, so that she could take occasion to ask, "Who are the beautiful ladies?" as if she failed to recognize her brother's allusion. In reality this was an innocent trick: she was more curious than she could have given a suitable reason for about the odd women from whom her neighbour had separated.

"Deluded, misguided, infatuated persons!" Gabriel Nash replied, understanding that she had asked for a description. "Strange, eccentric, almost romantic types. Predestined victims, simple-minded sacrificial lambs!"

This was copious, yet it was vague, so that Biddy could only respond, "Oh!" But meanwhile Peter Sherringham said to Nick—

"Julia's here, you know. You must go and see her."

Nick looked at him for an instant rather hard, as if to say, "You too?" But Peter's eyes appeared to answer, "No, no, not I;" upon which his cousin rejoined: "Of course I'll go and see her. I'll go immediately. Please to thank her for thinking of me."

"Thinking of you? There are plenty to think of you!" Lady Agnes said. "There are sure to be telegrams at home. We must go back—we must go back!"

"We must go back to England?" Nick Dormer asked; and as his mother made no answer he continued: "Do you mean I must go to Harsh?"

Her ladyship evaded this question, inquiring of Mr. Nash if he would have a morsel of fish; but her gain was small, for this gentleman, struck again by the unhappy name of the bereaved constituency, only broke out: "Ah, what a place to represent! How can you—how can you?"

"It's an excellent place," said Lady Agnes, coldly. "I imagine you have never been there. It's a very good place indeed. It belongs very largely to my cousin, Mrs. Dallow."

Gabriel partook of the fish, listening with interest. "But I thought we had no more pocket-boroughs."

"It's pockets we rather lack, so many of us. There are plenty of Harshes," Nick Dormer observed.

"I don't know what you mean," Lady Agnes said to Gabriel, with considerable majesty.

Peter Sherringham also addressed him with an "Oh, it's all right; they come down on you like a shot!" and the young man continued, ingenuously—

“Do you mean to say you have to pay to get into that place—that it’s not *you* that are paid?”

“Into that place?” Lady Agnes repeated, blankly.

“Into the House of Commons. That you don’t get a high salary?”

“My dear Nash, you’re delightful: don’t leave me—don’t leave me!” Nick cried; while his mother looked at him with an eye that demanded: “Who is this extraordinary person?”

“What then did you think pocket-boroughs were?” Peter Sherringham asked.

Mr. Nash’s facial radiance rested on him. “Why, boroughs that filled your pocket. To do that sort of thing without a bribe—*c’est trop fort!*”

“He lives at Samarcand,” Nick Dormer explained to his mother, who coloured perceptibly. “What do you advise me? I’ll do whatever you say,” he went on to his old acquaintance.

“My dear—my dear!” Lady Agnes pleaded.

“See Julia first, with all respect to Mr. Nash. She’s of excellent counsel,” said Peter Sherringham.

Gabriel Nash smiled across the table at Dormer. “The lady first—the lady first! I have not a word to suggest as against any idea of hers.”

“We must not sit here too long, there will be so much to do,” said Lady Agnes, anxiously, perceiving a certain slowness in the service of the *bœuf braisé*.

Biddy had been up to this moment mainly occupied in looking, covertly and at intervals, at Peter Sherringham; as was perfectly lawful in a young lady with a handsome cousin whom she had not seen for more than a year. But her sweet

voice now took license to throw in the words: "We know what Mr. Nash thinks of politics: he told us just now he thinks they are dreadful."

"No, not dreadful—only inferior," the personage impugned protested. "Everything is relative."

"Inferior to what?" Lady Agnes demanded.

Mr. Nash appeared to consider a moment. "To anything else that may be in question."

"Nothing else *is* in question!" said her ladyship, in a tone that would have been triumphant if it had not been dry.

"Ah, then!" And her neighbour shook his head sadly. He turned, after this, to Biddy, saying to her: "The ladies whom I was with just now, and in whom you were so good as to express an interest?" Biddy gave a sign of assent, and he went on: "They are persons theatrical; the younger one is trying to go upon the stage."

"And are you assisting her?" Biddy asked, pleased that she had guessed so nearly right.

"Not in the least—I'm rather heading her off. I consider it the lowest of the arts."

"Lower than politics?" asked Peter Sherringham, who was listening to this.

"Dear, no, I won't say that. I think the Théâtre Français a greater institution than the House of Commons."

"I agree with you there!" laughed Sherringham; "all the more that I don't consider the dramatic art a low one. On the contrary, it seems to me to include all the others."

"Yes—that's a view. I think it's the view of my friends."

"Of your friends?"

“Two ladies—old acquaintances—whom I met in Paris a week ago and whom I have just been spending an hour with in this place.”

“You should have seen them ; they struck me very much,” Biddy said to her cousin.

“I should like to see them, if they have really anything to say to the theatre.”

“It can easily be managed. Do you believe in the theatre?” asked Gabriel Nash.

“Passionately,” Sherringham confessed. “Don’t you?”

Before Mr. Nash had had time to answer Biddy had interposed with a sigh: “How I wish I could go—but in Paris I can’t!”

“I’ll take you, Biddy—I vow I’ll take you.”

“But the plays, Peter,” the girl objected. “Mamma says they’re worse than the pictures.”

“Oh, we’ll arrange that: they shall do one at the Français on purpose for a delightful little English girl.”

“Can you make them?”

“I can make them do anything I choose.”

“Ah, then, it’s the theatre that believes in you,” said Gabriel Nash.

“It would be ungrateful if it didn’t!” Peter Sherringham laughed.

Lady Agnes had withdrawn herself from between him and Mr. Nash, and, to signify that she, at least, had finished eating, had gone to sit by her son, whom she held, with some importunity, in conversation. But hearing the theatre talked of, she threw across an impersonal challenge to the



paradoxical young man. "Pray, should you think it better for a gentleman to be an actor?"

"Better than being a politician? Ah, comedian for comedian, isn't the actor more honest?"

Lady Agnes turned to her son and exclaimed with spirit: "Think of your great father, Nicholas!"

"He was an honest man; that perhaps is why he couldn't stand it."

Peter Sherringham judged the colloquy to have taken an uncomfortable twist, though not wholly, as it seemed to him, by the act of Nick's queer comrade. To draw it back to safer ground he said to this personage: "May I ask if the ladies you just spoke of are English—Mrs. and Miss Rooth: isn't that the rather odd name?"

"The very same. Only the daughter, according to her kind, desires to be known by some *nom de guerre* before she has even been able to enlist."

"And what does she call herself?" Bridget Dormer asked.

"Maud Vavasour, or Edith Temple, or Gladys Vane—some rubbish of that sort."

"What, then, is her own name?"

"Miriam—Miriam Rooth. It would do very well and would give her the benefit of the prepossessing fact that (to the best of my belief, at least) she is more than half a Jewess."

"It is as good as Rachel Félix," Sherringham said.

"The name's as good, but not the talent. The girl is magnificently stupid."

"And more than half a Jewess? Don't you believe it!" Sherringham exclaimed.



“Don’t believe she’s a Jewess?” Biddy asked, still more interested in Miriam Rooth.

“No, no—that she’s stupid, really. If she is, she’ll be the first.”

“Ah, you may judge for yourself,” Nash rejoined, “if you’ll come to-morrow afternoon to Madame Carré, Rue de Constantinople, à l’entresol.”

“Madame Carré? Why, I’ve already a note from her—I found it this morning on my return to Paris—asking me to look in at five o’clock and listen to a *jeune Anglaise*.”

“That’s my arrangement—I obtained the favour. The ladies want an opinion, and dear old Carré has consented to see them and to give one. Gladys will recite something and the venerable artist will pass judgment.”

Sherringham remembered that he had his note in his pocket, and he took it out and looked it over. “She wishes to make her a little audience—she says she’ll do better with that—and she asks me because I’m English. I shall make a point of going.”

“And bring Dormer if you can : the audience will be better. Will you come, Dormer?” Mr. Nash continued, appealing to his friend,—“will you come with me to see an old French actress and to hear an English amateur recite?”

Nick looked round from his talk with his mother and Grace. “I’ll go anywhere with you, so that, as I’ve told you, I may not lose sight of you, may keep hold of you.”

“Poor Mr. Nash, why is he so useful?” Lady Agnes demanded with a laugh.

“He steadies me, mother.”

"Oh, I wish you'd take me, Peter," Biddy broke out, wistfully, to her cousin.

"To spend an hour with an old French actress? Do you want to go upon the stage?" the young man inquired.

"No, but I want to see something, to know something."

"Madame Carré is wonderful in her way, but she is hardly company for a little English girl."

"I'm not little, I'm only too big; and *she* goes, the person you speak of."

"For a professional purpose, and with her good mother," smiled Gabriel Nash. "I think Lady Agnes would hardly venture—"

"Oh, I've seen her good mother!" said Biddy, as if she had an impression of what the worth of that protection might be.

"Yes, but you haven't heard her. It's then that you measure her."

Biddy was wistful still. "Is it the famous Honorine Carré, the great celebrity?"

"Honorine in person: the incomparable, the perfect!" said Peter Sherringham. "The first artist of our time, taking her altogether. She and I are old pals; she has been so good as to come and 'say' things, as she does sometimes still *dans le monde* as no one else does, in my rooms."

"Make her come, then; we can go *there*!"

"One of these days!"

"And the young lady—Miriam, Edith, Gladys—make her come too."

Sherringham looked at Nash, and the latter exclaimed: "Oh, you'll have no difficulty; she'll jump at it!"

“Very good; I’ll give a little artistic tea, with Julia, too, of course. And you must come, Mr. Nash.” This gentleman promised, with an inclination, and Peter continued: “But if, as you say, you’re not for helping the young lady, how came you to arrange this interview with the great model?”

“Precisely to stop her. The great model will find her very bad. Her judgments, as you probably know, are Rhadamanthine.”

“Poor girl!” said Biddy. “I think you’re cruel.”

“Never mind; I’ll look after them,” said Sherringham.

“And how can Madame Carré judge, if the girl recites English?”

“She’s so intelligent that she could judge if she recited Chinese,” Peter declared.

“That’s true, but the *jeune Anglaise* recites also in French,” said Gabriel Nash.

“Then she isn’t stupid.”

“And in Italian, and in several more tongues, for aught I know.”

Sherringham was visibly interested. “Very good; we’ll put her through them all.”

“She must be *most* clever,” Biddy went on, yearningly.

“She has spent her life on the Continent; she has wandered about with her mother; she has picked up things.”

“And is she a lady?” Biddy asked.

“Oh, tremendous! The great ones of the earth on the mother’s side. On the father’s, on the other hand, I imagine, only a Jew stockbroker in the city.”

“Then they’re rich—or ought to be,” Sherringham suggested.

“Ought to be—ah, there’s the bitterness! The stockbroker had too short a go—he was carried off in his flower. However, he left his wife a certain property, which she appears to have muddled away, not having the safeguard of being herself a Hebrew. This is what she lived upon till to-day—this and another resource. Her husband, as she has often told me, had the artistic temperament; that’s common, as you know, among *ces messieurs*. He made the most of his little opportunities and collected various pictures, tapestries, enamels, porcelains and similar gewgaws. He parted with them also, I gather, at a profit; in short, he carried on a neat little business as a *brocanteur*. It was nipped in the bud, but Mrs. Rooth was left with a certain number of these articles in her hands; indeed they must have constituted the most palpable part of her heritage. She was not a woman of business; she turned them, no doubt, to indifferent account; but she sold them piece by piece, and they kept her going while her daughter grew up. It was to this precarious traffic, conducted with extraordinary mystery and delicacy, that, five years ago, in Florence, I was indebted for my acquaintance with her. In those days I used to collect—Heaven help me!—I used to pick up rubbish which I could ill afford. It was a little phase—we have our little phases, haven’t we?” asked Gabriel Nash, with childlike trust—“and I have come out on the other side. Mrs. Rooth had an old green pot, and I heard of her old green pot. To hear of it was to long for it, so that I went to see it, under cover of night. I bought it, and a couple of years ago I overturned it and smashed it. It was the last of the little phase. It was not, however, as you have seen,

the last of Mrs. Rooth. I saw her afterwards in London, and I met her a year or two ago in Venice. She appears to be a great wanderer. She had other old pots, of other colours—red, yellow, black, or blue—she could produce them of any complexion you liked. I don't know whether she carried them about with her or whether she had little secret stores in the principal cities of Europe. To-day, at any rate, they seem all gone. On the other hand she has her daughter, who has grown up and who is a precious vase of another kind—less fragile, I hope, than the rest. May she not be overturned and smashed !”

Peter Sherringham and Biddy Dormer listened with attention to this history, and the girl testified to the interest with which she had followed it by saying, when Mr. Nash had ceased speaking : “ A Jewish stockbroker, a dealer in curiosities : what an odd person to marry—for a person who was well born ! I dare say he was a German.”

“ His name must have been simply Roth, and the poor lady, to smarten it up, has put in another o,” Sherringham ingeniously suggested.

“ You are both very clever,” said Gabriel Nash, “ and Rudolf Roth, as I happen to know, was indeed the designation of Maud Vavasour's papa. But, as far as the question of derogation goes, one might as well drown as starve, for what connection is *not* a misalliance when one happens to have the cumbersome, the unaccommodating honour of being a Neville-Nugent of Castle Nugent ? Such was the high lineage of Maud's mamma. I seem to have heard it mentioned that Rudolf Roth was very versatile and, like most of his species,



not unacquainted with the practice of music. He had been employed to teach the harmonium to Miss Neville-Nugent and she had profited by his lessons. If his daughter is like him—and she is not like her mother—he was darkly and dangerously handsome. So I venture rapidly to reconstruct the situation.”

A silence, for the moment, had fallen upon Lady Agnes and her other two children, so that Mr. Nash, with his universal urbanity, practically addressed these last remarks to them as well as to his other auditors. Lady Agnes looked as if she wondered whom he was talking about, and having caught the name of a noble residence she inquired—

“Castle Nugent—where is that?”

“It’s a domain of immeasurable extent and almost inconceivable splendour, but I fear it isn’t to be found in any prosaic earthly geography!” Lady Agnes rested her eyes on the tablecloth, as if she were not sure a liberty had not been taken with her, and while Mr. Nash continued to abound in descriptive suppositions—“It must be on the banks of the Manzanares or the Guadalquivir”—Peter Sherringham, whose imagination appeared to have been strongly kindled by the sketch of Miriam Rooth, challenging him sociably, reminded him that he had a short time before assigned a low place to the dramatic art and had not yet answered his question as to whether he believed in the theatre. This gave Nash an opportunity to go on :

“I don’t know that I understand your question ; there are different ways of taking it. Do I think it’s important ? Is that what you mean ? Important, certainly, to managers and stage-carpenters who want to make money, to ladies and



gentlemen who want to produce themselves in public by lime-light, and to other ladies and gentlemen who are bored and stupid and don't know what to do with their evening. It's a commercial and social convenience which may be infinitely worked. But important artistically, intellectually? How *can* it be—so poor, so limited a form?"

"Dear me, it strikes me as so rich, so various! Do *you* think it's poor and limited, Nick?" Sherringham added, appealing to his kinsman.

"I think whatever Nash thinks. I have no opinion to-day but his."

This answer of Nick Dormer's drew the eyes of his mother and sisters to him, and caused his friend to exclaim that he was not used to such responsibilities, so few people had ever tested his presence of mind by agreeing with him.

"Oh, I used to be of your way of feeling," Nash said to Sherringham. "I understand you perfectly. It's a phase like another. I've been through it—*j'ai été comme ça.*"

"And you went, then, very often to the Théâtre Français, and it was there I saw you. I place you now."

"I'm afraid I noticed none of the other spectators," Nash explained. "I had no attention but for the great Carré—she was still on the stage. Judge of my infatuation, and how I can allow for yours, when I tell you that I sought her acquaintance, that I couldn't rest till I had told her that I hung upon her lips."

"That's just what *I* told her," returned Sherringham.

"She was very kind to me. She said, '*Vous me rendez des forces.*'"

"That's just what she said to me!"

"And we have remained very good friends."

"So have *we*!" laughed Sherringham. "And such perfect art as hers: do you mean to say you don't consider *that* important—such a rare dramatic intelligence?"

"I'm afraid you read the *feuilletons*. You catch their phrases," Gabriel Nash blandly rejoined. "Dramatic intelligence is never rare; nothing is more common."

"Then why have we so many bad actors?"

"Have we? I thought they were mostly good; succeeding more easily and more completely in that business than in anything else. What could they do—those people, generally—if they didn't do that? And reflect that *that* enables them to succeed! Of course, always, there are numbers of people on the stage who are no actors at all, for it's even easier to our poor humanity to be ineffectively stupid and vulgar than to bring down the house."

"It's not easy, by what I can see, to produce, completely, any artistic effect," Sherringham declared; "and those that the actor produces are among the most moving that we know. You'll not persuade me that to watch such an actress as Madame Carré was not an education of the taste, an enlargement of one's knowledge."

"She did what she could, poor woman, but in what belittling, coarsening conditions! She had to interpret a character in a play, and a character in a play (not to say the whole piece—I speak more particularly of modern pieces) is such a wretchedly small peg to hang anything on! The dramatist shows us so little, is so hampered by his audience, is restricted to so poor an analysis."

“I know the complaint. It’s all the fashion now. The *raffinés* despise the theatre,” said Peter Sherringham, in the manner of a man abreast with the culture of his age and not to be captured by a surprise. “*Connu, connu!*”

“It will be known better yet, won’t it? when the essentially brutal nature of the modern audience is still more perceived, when it has been properly analyzed: the *omnium gatherum* of the population of a big commercial city, at the hour of the day when their taste is at its lowest, flocking out of hideous hotels and restaurants, gorged with food, stultified with buying and selling and with all the other sordid speculations of the day, squeezed together in a sweltering mass, disappointed in their seats, timing the author, timing the actor, wishing to get their money back on the spot, before eleven o’clock. Fancy putting the exquisite before such a tribunal as that! There’s not even a question of it. The dramatist wouldn’t if he could, and in nine cases out of ten he couldn’t if he would. He has to make the basest concessions. One of his principal canons is that he must enable his spectators to catch the suburban trains, which stop at 11.30. What would you think of any other artist—the painter or the novelist—whose governing forces should be the dinner and the suburban trains? The old dramatists didn’t defer to them (not so much, at least), and that’s why they are less and less actable. If they are touched—the large fellows—it’s only to be mutilated and trivialized. Besides, they had a simpler civilization to represent—societies in which the life of man was in action, in passion, in immediate and violent expression. Those things could be put upon the playhouse boards with comparatively

little sacrifice of their completeness and their truth. To-day we are so infinitely more reflective and complicated and diffuse that it makes all the difference. What can you do with a character, with an idea, with a feeling, between dinner and the suburban trains? You can give a gross, rough sketch of them, but how little you touch them, how bald you leave them! What crudity compared with what the novelist does!"

"Do you write novels, Mr. Nash?" Peter demanded.

"No, but I read them when they are extraordinarily good, and I don't go to plays. I read Balzac, for instance—I encounter the magnificent portrait of Valérie Marneffe, in 'La Cousine Bette.'"

"And you contrast it with the poverty of Emile Augier's Séraphine in 'Les Lionnes Pauvres'? I was awaiting you there. That's the *cheval de bataille* of you fellows."

"What an extraordinary discussion! What dreadful authors!" Lady Agnes murmured to her son. But he was listening so attentively to the other young men that he made no response, and Peter Sherringham went on:

"I have seen Madame Carré in parts, in the modern repertory, which she has made as vivid to me, caused to abide as ineffaceably in my memory, as Valérie Marneffe. She is the Balzac, as one may say, of actresses."

"The miniaturist, as it were, of whitewashers!" Nash rejoined, laughing.

It might have been guessed that Sherringham was irritated, but the other disputant was so good-humoured that he abundantly recognized his own obligation to appear so.

"You would be magnanimous if you thought the young

lady you have introduced to our old friend would be important."

"She might be much more so than she ever will be."

Lady Agnes got up, to terminate the scene, and even to signify that enough had been said about people and questions she had never heard of. Every one else rose, the waiter brought Nick the receipt of the bill, and Sherringham went on, to his interlocutor—

"Perhaps she will be more so than you think."

"Perhaps—if *you* take an interest in her!"

"A mystic voice seems to exhort me to do so, to whisper that, though I have never seen her, I shall find something in her. What do you say, Biddy, shall I take an interest in her?"

Biddy hesitated a moment, coloured a little, felt a certain embarrassment in being publicly treated as an oracle.

"If she's not nice I don't advise it."

"And if she *is* nice?"

"You advise it still less!" her brother exclaimed, laughing and putting his arm round her.

Lady Agnes looked sombre—she might have been saying to herself: "Dear me, what chance has a girl of mine with a man who's so agog about actresses?" She was disconcerted and distressed; a multitude of incongruous things, all the morning, had been forced upon her attention—displeasing pictures and still more displeasing theories about them, vague portents of perversity on the part of Nicholas, and a strange eagerness on Peter's, learned apparently in Paris, to discuss, with a person who had a tone she never had been exposed



to, topics irrelevant and uninteresting, the practical effect of which was to make light of her presence. "Let us leave this—let us leave this!" she almost moaned. The party moved together toward the door of departure, and her ruffled spirit was not soothed by hearing her son remark to his terrible friend: "You know you don't leave us—I stick to you!"

At this Lady Agnes broke out and interposed: "Excuse me for reminding you that you are going to call on Julia."

"Well, can't Nash also come to call on Julia? That's just what I want—that she should see him."

Peter Sherringham came humanely to her ladyship's assistance. "A better way, perhaps, will be for them to meet under my auspices, at my 'dramatic tea.' This will enable me to return one favour for another. If Mr. Nash is so good as to introduce me to this aspirant for honours we estimate so differently, I will introduce him to my sister, a much more positive quantity."

"It is easy to see who'll have the best of it!" Grace Dormer exclaimed; and Gabriel Nash stood there serenely, impartially, in a graceful, detached way which seemed characteristic of him, assenting to any decision that relieved him of the grossness of choice, and generally confident that things would turn out well for him. He was cheerfully helpless and sociably indifferent; ready to preside with a smile even at a discussion of his own admissibility.

"Nick will bring you. I have a little corner at the Embassy," Sherringham continued.

"You are very kind. You must bring him, then, tomorrow—Rue de Constantinople."



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“ At five o’clock—don’t be afraid.”

“ Oh, dear ! ” said Biddy, as they went on again ; and Lady Agnes, seizing his arm, marched off more quickly with her son. When they came out into the Champs Elysées Nick Dormer, looking round, saw that his friend had disappeared. Biddy had attached herself to Peter, and Grace apparently had not encouraged Mr. Nash.

## V.

LADY AGNES's idea had been that her son should go straight from the Palais de l'Industrie to the Hôtel de Hollande, with or without his mother and his sisters, as his humour should seem to recommend. Much as she desired to see their brilliant kinswoman and as she knew that her daughters desired it, she was quite ready to postpone their visit, if this sacrifice should contribute to a speedy confrontation for Nick. She was eager that he should talk with Mrs. Dallow, and eager that he should be eager himself; but it presently appeared that he was really not anything that could impartially be called so. His view was that she and the girls should go to the Hôtel de Hollande without delay and should spend the rest of the day with Julia, if they liked. He would go later; he would go in the evening. There were lots of things he wanted to do meanwhile.

This question was discussed with some intensity, though not at length, while the little party stood on the edge of the Place de la Concorde, to which they had proceeded on foot; and Lady Agnes noticed that the "lots of things" to which he proposed to give precedence over an urgent duty, a conference with a person who held out full hands to him, were implied somehow in the friendly glance with which he covered

the great square, the opposite bank of the Seine, the steep blue roofs of the quay, the bright immensity of Paris. What in the world could be more important than making sure of his seat?—so quickly did the good lady's imagination travel. And now that idea appealed to him less than a ramble in search of old books and prints, for she was sure this was what he had in his head. Julia would be flattered if she knew it, but of course she must not know it. Lady Agnes was already thinking of the most honourable explanations she could give of the young man's want of precipitation. She would have liked to represent him as tremendously occupied, in his room at their own hotel, in getting off political letters to every one it should concern, and particularly in drawing up his address to the electors of Harsh. Fortunately she was a woman of innumerable discretions, and a part of the worn look that sat in her face came from her having schooled herself for years, in her relations with her husband and her sons, not to insist unduly. She would have liked to insist, nature had formed her to insist, and the self-control had told in more ways than one. Even now it was powerless to prevent her suggesting that before doing anything else Nick should at least repair to the inn and see if there were not some telegrams.

He freely consented to do so much as this, and having called a cab, that she might go her way with the girls, he kissed her again, as he had done at the exhibition. This was an attention that could never displease her, but somehow when he kissed her often her anxiety was apt to increase: she had come to recognize it as a sign that he was slipping away from her. She drove off with a vague sense that at any rate she and the

girls might do something toward keeping the place warm for him. She had been a little vexed that Peter had not administered more of a push toward the Hôtel de Hollande, clear as it had become to her now that there was a foreignness in Peter which was not to be counted on and which made him speak of English affairs and even of English domestic politics as local. Of course they were local, and was not that the warm human comfort of them? As she left the two young men standing together in the middle of the Place de la Concorde, the grand composition of which Nick, as she looked back, appeared to have paused to admire, (as if he had not seen it a thousand times!) she wished she might have thought of Peter's influence with her son as exerted a little more in favour of localism. She had a sense that he would not abbreviate the boy's ill-timed *flânerie*. However, he had been very nice: he had invited them all to dine with him that evening at a convenient restaurant, promising to bring Julia and one of his colleagues. So much as this he had been willing to do to make sure that Nick and his sister should meet. His want of localism, moreover, was not so great as that if it should turn out that there *was* anything beneath his manner toward Biddy—! The conclusion of this reflection is, perhaps, best indicated by the circumstance of her ladyship's remarking, after a minute, to her younger daughter, who sat opposite to her in the *voiture de place*, that it would do no harm if she should get a new hat, and that the article might be purchased that afternoon.

“A French hat, mamma?” said Grace. “Oh, do wait till she gets home!”

“I think they are prettier here, you know,” Biddy rejoined; and Lady Agnes said, simply, “I dare say they’re cheaper.” What was in her mind, in fact, was, “I dare say Peter thinks them becoming.” It will be seen that she had plenty of spiritual occupation, the sum of which was not diminished by her learning, when she reached the top of the Rue de la Paix, that Mrs. Dallow had gone out half an hour before and had left no message. She was more disconcerted by this incident than she could have explained or than she thought was right, for she had taken for granted that Julia would be in a manner waiting for them. How did she know that Nick was not coming? When people were in Paris for a few days they didn’t mope in the house; but Julia might have waited a little longer or might have left an explanation. Was she then not so much in earnest about Nick’s standing? Didn’t she recognize the importance of being there to see him about it? Lady Agnes wondered whether Julia’s behaviour were a sign that she was already tired of the way this young gentleman treated her. Perhaps she had gone out because an instinct told her that its being important he should see her early would make no difference with him—told her that he wouldn’t come. Her heart sank as she glanced at this possibility that Julia was already tired, for she, on her side, had an instinct there were still more tiresome things in store. She had disliked having to tell Mrs. Dallow that Nick wouldn’t see her till the evening, but now she disliked still more her not being there to hear it. She even resented a little her kinswoman’s not having reasoned that she and the girls would come in any event, and not thought them worth staying in for. It

occurred to her that she would perhaps have gone to their hotel, which was a good way up the Rue de Rivoli, near the Palais Royal, and she directed the cabman to drive to that establishment.

As he jogged along she took in some degree the measure of what that might mean, Julia's seeking a little to avoid them. Was she growing to dislike them? Did she think they kept too sharp an eye on her, so that the idea of their standing in a still closer relation to her would not be enticing? Her conduct up to this time had not worn such an appearance, unless perhaps a little, just a very little, in the matter of poor Grace. Lady Agnes knew that she was not particularly fond of poor Grace, and was even able to guess the reason—the manner in which Grace betrayed the most that they wanted to make sure of her. She remembered how long the girl had stayed the last time she had gone to Harsh. She had gone for an acceptable week, and she had been in the house a month. She took a private, heroic vow that Grace should not go near the place again for a year; that is, not unless Nick and Julia were married before this. If that were to happen she shouldn't care. She recognized that it was not absolutely everything that Julia should be in love with Nick; it was also better she should dislike his mother and sisters after than before. Lady Agnes did justice to the natural rule in virtue of which it usually comes to pass that a woman doesn't get on with her husband's female belongings, and was even willing to be sacrificed to it in her disciplined degree. But she desired not to be sacrificed for nothing: if she was to be objected to as a mother-in-law she wished to be the mother-in-law first.



At the hotel in the Rue de Rivoli she had the disappointment of finding that Mrs. Dallow had not called, and also that no telegrams had come. She went in with the girls for half an hour, and then she straggled out with them again. She was undetermined and dissatisfied, and the afternoon was rather a problem; of the kind moreover that she disliked most and was least accustomed to: not a choice between different things to do (her life had been full of that), but a want of anything to do at all. Nick had said to her before they separated: "You can knock about with the girls, you know; everything is amusing here." That was easily said, while he sauntered and gossiped with Peter Sherringham and perhaps went to see more pictures like those in the Salon. He was usually, on such occasions, very good-natured about spending his time with them; but this episode had taken altogether a perverse, profane form. She had no desire whatever to knock about, and she was far from finding everything in Paris amusing. She had no aptitude for aimlessness, and moreover she thought it vulgar. If she had found Julia's card at the hotel (the sign of a hope of catching them just as they came back from the Salon), she would have made a second attempt to see her before the evening; but now certainly they would leave her alone. Lady Agnes wandered joylessly with the girls in the Palais Royal and the Rue de Richelieu, and emerged upon the Boulevard, where they continued their frugal prowling, as Biddy rather irritatingly called it. They went into five shops to buy a hat for Biddy, and her ladyship's presuppositions of cheapness were wofully belied.

"Who in the world is your funny friend?" Peter

Sherringham meanwhile asked of his kinsman. He lost no time as they walked together.

"Ah, there's something else you lost by going to Cambridge—you lost Gabriel Nash!"

"He sounds like an Elizabethan dramatist," Sherringham said. "But I haven't lost him, since it appears now that I shall not be able to have you without him."

"Oh, as for that, wait a little. I'm going to try him again, but I don't know how he wears. What I mean is that you have probably lost his freshness. I have an idea he has become conventional, or at any rate serious."

"Bless me, do you call that serious?"

"He used to be so gay. He had a real genius for suggestive paradox. He was a wonderful talker."

"It seems to me he does very well now," said Peter Sherringham.

"Oh, this is nothing. He had great flights of old, very great flights; one saw him rise and rise and turn summersaults in the blue, and wondered how far he could go. He's very intelligent, and I should think it might be interesting to find out what it is that prevents the whole man from being as good as his parts. I mean in case he isn't so good."

"I see you more than suspect that. May it not simply be that he's an ass?"

"That would be the whole—I shall see in time—but it certainly isn't one of the parts. It may be the effect, but it isn't the cause, and it's for the cause that I claim an interest. I imagine you think he's an ass on account of what he said about the theatre, his pronouncing it a coarse art."

"To differ about him that reason will do," said Sherringham. "The only bad one would be one that shouldn't preserve our difference. You needn't tell me you agree with him, for frankly I don't care."

"Then your passion still burns?" Nick Dormer asked.

"My passion?"

"I don't mean for any individual exponent of the contestable art: mark the guilty conscience, mark the rising blush, mark the confusion of mind! I mean the old sign one knew you best by: your permanent stall at the Français, your inveterate attendance at *premières*, the way you 'follow' the young talents and the old."

"Yes, it's still my little hobby: my little folly, if you like. I don't see that I get tired of it. What will you have? Strong predilections are rather a blessing; they are simplifying. I am fond of representation—the representation of life: I like it better, I think, than the real thing. You like it, too, so you have no right to cast the stone. You like it best done one way and I another; and our preference, on either side, has a deep root in us. There is a fascination to me in the way the actor does it, when his talent (ah, he must have that!) has been highly trained (ah, it must *be* that!) The things he can do, in this effort at representation (with the dramatist to give him his lift) seem to me innumerable—he can carry it to a delicacy!—and I take great pleasure in observing them, in recognizing them and comparing them. It's an amusement like another: I don't pretend to call it by any exalted name; but in this vale of friction it will serve. One can lose one's self in it, and it has this recommendation (in common, I suppose,

with the study of the other arts), that the further you go in it the more you find. So I go rather far, if you will. But is it the principal sign one knows me by?" Sherringham abruptly asked.

"Don't be ashamed of it, or it will be ashamed of you. I ought to discriminate. You are distinguished among my friends and relations by being a rising young diplomatist; but you know I always want the further distinction, the last analysis. Therefore I surmise that you are conspicuous among rising young diplomatists for the infatuation that you describe in such pretty terms."

"You evidently believe that it will prevent me from rising very high. But pastime for pastime, is it any idler than yours?"

"Than mine?"

"Why, you have half a dozen, while I only allow myself the luxury of one. For the theatre is my sole vice, really. Is this more wanton, say, than to devote weeks to ascertaining in what particular way your friend Mr. Nash may be a twaddler? That's not my ideal of choice recreation, but I would undertake to do it sooner. You're a young statesman (who happens to be *en disponibilité* for the moment), but you spend not a little of your time in besmearing canvas with bright-coloured pigments. The idea of representation fascinates you, but in your case it's representation in oils—or do you practise water-colours too? You even go much further than I, for I study my art of predilection only in the works of others. I don't aspire to leave works of my own. You're a painter, possibly a great one; but I'm not an actor." Nick

Dormer declared that he would certainly become one—he was on the way to it; and Sherringham, without heeding this charge, went on: “Let me add that, considering you *are* a painter, your portrait of the complicated Nash is lamentably dim.”

“He’s not at all complicated; he’s only too simple to give an account of. Most people have a lot of attributes and appendages that dress them up and superscribe them, and what I like him for is that he hasn’t any at all. It makes him so cool.”

“By Jove, you match him there! It’s an attribute to be tolerated. How does he manage it?”

“I haven’t the least idea—I don’t know that he *is* tolerated. I don’t think any one has ever detected the process. His means, his profession, his belongings have never anything to do with the question. He doesn’t shade off into other people; he’s as neat as an outline cut out of paper with scissors. I like him, therefore, because in intercourse with him you know what you’ve got hold of. With most men you don’t: to pick the flower you must break off the whole dusty, thorny, worldly branch; you find you are taking up in your grasp all sorts of other people and things, dangling accidents and conditions. Poor Nash has none of those ramifications; he’s the solitary blossom.”

“My dear fellow, you would be better for a little of the same pruning!” Sherringham exclaimed; and the young men continued their walk and their gossip, jerking each other this way and that with a sociable roughness consequent on their having been boys together. Intimacy had reigned, of old,



between the little Sherringhams and the little Dormers, united by country contiguity and by the circumstance that there was first-cousinship, not neglected, among the parents, Lady Agnes standing in this convertible relation to Lady Windrush, the mother of Peter and Julia as well as of other daughters and of a maturer youth who was to inherit, and who since then had inherited, the ancient barony. Since then many things had altered, but not the deep foundation of sociability. One of our young men had gone to Eton and the other to Harrow (the scattered school on the hill was the tradition of the Dormers), and the divergence had taken its course later, in university years. Bricket, however, had remained accessible to Windrush, and Windrush to Bricket, to which Percival Dormer had now succeeded, terminating the interchange a trifle rudely by letting out that pleasant white house in the midlands (its expropriated inhabitants, Lady Agnes and her daughters, adored it) to an American reputed rich, who, in the first flush of international comparison, considered that for twelve hundred a year he got it at a bargain. Bricket had come to the late Sir Nicholas from his elder brother, who died wifeless and childless. The new baronet, so different from his father (though he recalled at some points the uncle after whom he had been named) that Nick had to make it up by aspirations of resemblance, roamed about the world taking shots which excited the enthusiasm of society, when society heard of them, at the few legitimate creatures of the chase which the British rifle had spared. Lady Agnes, meanwhile, settled with her girls in a gabled, latticed house in a creditable quarter, though it was still a little raw, of the



temperate zone of London. It was not into her lap, poor woman, that the revenues of Bricket were poured. There was no dower-house attached to that moderate property, and the allowance with which the estate was charged on her ladyship's behalf was not an incitement to grandeur.

Nick had a room under his mother's roof, which he mainly used to dress for dinner when he dined in Calcutta Gardens, and he had "kept on" his chambers in the Temple; for to a young man in public life an independent address was indispensable. Moreover, he was suspected of having a studio in an out-of-the-way quarter of the town, the indistinguishable parts of South Kensington, incongruous as such a retreat might seem in the case of a member of Parliament. It was an absurd place to see his constituents, unless he wanted to paint their portraits, a kind of representation with which they scarcely would have been satisfied; and in fact the only question of portraiture had been when the wives and daughters of several of them expressed a wish for the picture of their handsome young member. Nick had not offered to paint it himself, and the studio was taken for granted rather than much looked into by the ladies in Calcutta Gardens. Too express a disposition to regard whims of this sort as a pure extravagance was known by them to be open to correction; for they were not oblivious that Mr. Carteret had humours which weighed against them in the shape of convenient cheques nestling between the inside pages of legible letters of advice. Mr. Carteret was Nick's providence, as Nick was looked to, in a general way, to be that of his mother and sisters, especially since it had become so plain that Percy,

who was ungracefully selfish, would operate, mainly with a "six-bore," quite out of that sphere. It was not for studios, certainly, that Mr. Carteret sent cheques; but they were an expression of general confidence in Nick, and a little expansion was natural to a young man enjoying such a luxury as that. It was sufficiently felt, in Calcutta Gardens, that Nick could be looked to not to betray such a confidence; for Mr. Carteret's behaviour could have no name at all unless one were prepared to call it encouraging. He had never promised anything, but he was one of the delightful persons with whom the redemption precedes or dispenses with the vow. He had been an early and lifelong friend of the late right honourable gentleman, a political follower, a devoted admirer, a stanch supporter in difficult hours. He had never married, espousing nothing more reproductive than Sir Nicholas's views (he used to write letters to the *Times* in favour of them), and had, so far as was known, neither chick nor child; nothing but an amiable little family of eccentricities, the flower of which was his odd taste for living in a small, steep, clean country town, all green gardens and red walls, with a girdle of hedge-rows, clustering about an immense brown old abbey. When Lady Agnes's imagination rested upon the future of her second son she liked to remember that Mr. Carteret had nothing to "keep-up:" the inference seemed so direct that he would keep up Nick.

The most important event in the life of this young man had been incomparably his victory, under his father's eyes, more than two years before, in the sharp contest for Crockhurst—a victory which his consecrated name, his extreme youth, his

ardour in the fray, the general personal sympathy of the party and the attention excited by the fresh cleverness of his speeches, tinted with young idealism and yet sticking sufficiently to the question (the burning question, it has since burnt out), had rendered almost brilliant. There had been leaders in the newspapers about it, half in compliment to her husband, who was known to be failing so prematurely (he was almost as young to die, and to die famous—Lady Agnes regarded it as famous—as his son had been to stand), which the boy's mother religiously preserved, cut out and tied together with a ribbon, in the innermost drawer of a favourite cabinet. But it had been a barren, or almost a barren triumph, for in the order of importance in Nick's history another incident had run it, as the phrase is, very close: nothing less than the quick dissolution of the Parliament in which he was so manifestly destined to give symptoms of a future. He had not recovered his seat at the general election, for the second contest was even sharper than the first, and the Tories had put forward a loud, vulgar, rattling, almost bullying man. It was to a certain extent a comfort that poor Sir Nicholas, who had been witness of the bright hour, passed away before the darkness. He died, with all his hopes on his second son's head, unconscious of near disaster, handing on the torch and the tradition, after a long, supreme interview with Nick, at which Lady Agnes had not been present but which she knew to have been a sort of paternal dedication, a solemn communication of ideas on the highest national questions (she had reason to believe he had touched on those of external as well as of domestic and of colonial policy), leaving on the boy's

nature and manner from that moment the most unmistakable traces. If his tendency to reverie increased, it was because he had so much to think over in what his pale father had said to him in the hushed, dim chamber, laying upon him the great mission of carrying out the unachieved and reviving a silent voice. It was work cut out for a lifetime, and that "co-ordinating power in relation to detail," which was one of the great characteristics of Sir Nicholas's high distinction (the most analytic of the weekly papers was always talking about it), had enabled him to rescue the prospect from any shade of vagueness or of ambiguity.

Five years before Nick Dormer went up to be questioned by the electors of Crockhurst, Peter Sherringham appeared before a board of examiners who let him off much less easily, though there were also some flattering prejudices in his favour; such influences being a part of the copious, light, unembarrassing baggage with which each of the young men began life. Peter passed, however, passed high, and had his reward in prompt assignment to small, subordinate diplomatic duties in Germany. Since then he had had his professional adventures, which need not arrest us, inasmuch as they had all paled in the light of his appointment, nearly three years previous to the moment of our making his acquaintance, to a secretaryship of embassy in Paris. He had done well and had gone fast, and for the present he was willing enough to rest. It pleased him better to remain in Paris as a subordinate than to go to Honduras as a principal, and Nick Dormer had not put a false colour on the matter in speaking of his stall at the Théâtre Français as a sedative to his ambition. Nick's

inferiority in age to his cousin sat on him more lightly than when they had been in their teens; and indeed no one can very well be much older than a young man who has figured for a year, however imperceptibly, in the House of Commons. Separation and diversity had made them strange enough to each other to give a taste to what they shared; they were friends without being particular friends; that further degree could always hang before them as a suitable but not oppressive contingency, and they were both conscious that it was in their interest to keep certain differences to "chaff" each other about—so possible was it that they might have quarrelled if they had only agreed. Peter, as being wide-minded, was a little irritated to find his cousin always so intensely British, while Nick Dormer made him the object of the same compassionate criticism, recognized that he had a rare knack with foreign tongues, but reflected, and even with extravagance declared, that it was a pity to have gone so far from home only to remain so homely. Moreover, Nick had his ideas about the diplomatic mind; it was the moral type of which, on the whole, he thought least favourably. Dry, narrow, barren, poor, he pronounced it in familiar conversation with the clever secretary; wanting in imagination, in generosity, in the finest perceptions and the highest courage. This served as well as anything else to keep the peace between them; it was a necessity of their friendly intercourse that they should scuffle a little, and it scarcely mattered what they scuffled about. Nick Dormer's express enjoyment of Paris, the shop-windows on the quays, the old books on the parapet, the gaiety of the river, the grandeur of the Louvre, all the amusing tints



and tones, struck his companion as a sign of insularity ; the appreciation of such things having become with Sherringham an unconscious habit, a contented assimilation. If poor Nick, for the hour, was demonstrative and lyrical, it was because he had no other way of sounding the note of farewell to the independent life of which the term seemed now definitely in sight ; the sense pressed upon him that these were the last moments of his freedom. He would waste time till half-past seven, because half-past seven meant dinner, and dinner meant his mother, solemnly attended by the strenuous shade of his father and reinforced by Julia.



## VI.

WHEN Nick arrived with the three members of his family, Peter Sherringham was seated, in the restaurant at which the tryst had been taken, at a small but immaculate table ; but Mrs. Dallow was not yet on the scene, and they had time for a sociable settlement—time to take their places and unfold their napkins, crunch their rolls, breathe the savoury air and watch the door, before the usual raising of heads and suspension of forks, the sort of stir that accompanied most of this lady's movements, announced her entrance. The *dame de comptoir* ducked and re-ducked, the people looked round, Peter and Nick got up, there was a shuffling of chairs—Julia was there. Peter had related how he had stopped at her hotel to bring her with him and had found her, according to her custom, by no means ready ; on which, fearing that his guests would come first to the rendezvous and find no proper welcome, he had come off without her, leaving her to follow. He had not brought a friend, as he intended, having divined that Julia would prefer a pure family party, if she wanted to talk about her candidate. Now she stood there, looking down at the table and her expectant kinsfolk, drawing off her gloves, letting her brother draw off her jacket, lifting her hands for some rearrangement of her bonnet. She looked at Nick last, smiling,

but only for a moment. She said to Peter, "Are we going to dine here? Oh dear, why didn't you have a private room?"

Nick had not seen her at all for several weeks, and had seen her but little for a year, but her off-hand, cursory manner had not altered in the interval. She spoke remarkably fast, as if speech were not in itself a pleasure—to have it over as soon as possible; and her *brusquerie* was of the kind that friendly critics account for by pleading shyness. Shyness had never appeared to him an ultimate quality or a real explanation of anything; it only explained an effect by another effect, giving a bad fault another name. What he suspected in Julia was that her mind was less graceful than her person; an ugly, a really damnatory idea, which as yet he had only half accepted. It was a case in which she was entitled to the benefit of every doubt and ought not to be judged without a complete trial. Dormer, meanwhile, was afraid of the trial (this was partly why, of late, he had been to see her so little), because he was afraid of the sentence, afraid of anything, happening which should lessen the pleasure it was actually in the power of her beauty to give. There were people who thought her rude, and he hated rude women. If he should fasten on that view, or rather if that view should fasten on him, what could still please and what he admired in her would lose too much of its sweetness. If it be thought odd that he had not yet been able to read the character of a woman he had known since childhood, the answer is that that character had grown faster than Nick Dormer's observation. The growth was constant, whereas the observation was but occasional, though it had begun early. If he had attempted to phrase the matter to

himself, as he probably had not, he might have said that the effect she produced upon him was too much a compulsion ; not the coercion of design, of importunity, nor the vulgar pressure of family expectation, a suspected desire that he should like her enough to marry her, but something that was a mixture of diverse things, of the sense that she was imperious and generous—but probably more the former than the latter—and of a certain prevision of doom, the influence of the idea that he should come to it, that he was predestined.

This had made him shrink from knowing the worst about her ; the desire, not to get used to it in time, but what was more characteristic of him, to interpose a temporary illusion. Illusions and realities and hopes and fears, however, fell into confusion whenever he met her after a separation. The separation, so far as seeing her alone or as continuous talk was concerned, had now been tolerably long ; had lasted really ever since his failure to regain his seat. An impression had come to him that she judged that failure rather harshly, had thought he ought to have done better. This was a part of her imperious strain, and a part to which it was not easy to accommodate one's self on a present basis. If he were to marry her he should come to an understanding with her : he should give her his own measure as well as take hers. But the understanding, in the actual case, might suggest too much that he *was* to marry her. You could quarrel with your wife, because there were compensations—for her ; but you might not be prepared to offer these compensations as prepayment for the luxury of quarrelling.

It was not that such a luxury would not be considerable,

Nick Dormer thought, as Julia Dallow's fine head poised itself before him again ; a high spirit was a better thing than a poor one to be mismated with, any day in the year. She had much the same colouring as her brother, but as nothing else in her face was the same the resemblance was not striking. Her hair was of so dark a brown that it was commonly regarded as black, and so abundant that a plain arrangement was required to keep it in discreet relation to the rest of her person. Her eyes were of a gray tint that was sometimes pronounced too light ; and they were not sunken in her face, but placed well on the surface. Her nose was perfect, but her mouth was too small ; and Nick Dormer, and doubtless other persons as well, had sometimes wondered how, with such a mouth, her face could have expressed decision. Her figure helped it, for she looked tall (being extremely slender), though she was not ; and her head took turns and positions which, though they were a matter of but half an inch out of the common, this way or that, somehow contributed to the air of resolution and temper. If it had not been for her extreme delicacy of line and surface she might have been called bold ; but as it was she looked refined and quiet—refined by tradition and quiet for a purpose. And altogether she was beautiful, with the pure style of her capable head, her hair like darkness, her eyes like early twilight, her mouth like a rare pink flower.

Peter said that he had not taken a private room because he knew Biddy's tastes ; she liked to see the world (she had told him so), the curious people, the coming and going of Paris. "Oh, anything for Biddy !" Julia replied, smiling at the girl and taking her place. Lady Agnes and her elder daughter

exchanged one of their looks, and Nick exclaimed jocosely that he didn't see why the whole party should be sacrificed to a presumptuous child. The presumptuous child blushinglly protested she had never expressed any such wish to Peter, upon which Nick, with broader humour, revealed that Peter had served them so out of stinginess: he had pitchforked them together in the public room because he wouldn't go to the expense of a *cabinet*. He had brought no guest, no foreigner of distinction nor diplomatic swell, to honour them, and now they would see what a paltry dinner he would give them. Peter stabbed him indignantly with a long roll, and Lady Agnes, who seemed to be waiting for some manifestation on Mrs. Dallow's part which didn't come, concluded, with a certain coldness, that they quite sufficed to themselves for privacy as well as for society. Nick called attention to this fine phrase of his mother's, said it was awfully neat, while Grace and Biddy looked harmoniously at Julia's clothes. Nick felt nervous, and joked a good deal to carry it off—a levity that didn't prevent Julia's saying to him, after a moment: "You might have come to see me to-day, you know. Didn't you get my message from Peter?"

"Scold him, Julia—scold him well. I begged him to go," said Lady Agnes; and to this Grace added her voice with an "Oh, Julia, do give it to him!" These words, however, had not the effect they suggested, for Mrs. Dallow only murmured, with an ejaculation, in her quick, curt way, that that would be making far too much of him. It was one of the things in her which Nick Dormer mentally pronounced ungraceful that a perversity of pride or shyness always made her disappoint



you a little if she saw you expected a thing. She was certain to snub effusiveness. This vice, however, was the last thing of which Lady Agnes would have consented to being accused; and Nick, while he replied to Julia that he was certain he shouldn't have found her, was not unable to perceive the operation on his mother of that shade of manner. "He ought to have gone; he owed you that," she went on; "but it's very true he would have had the same luck as we. I went with the girls directly after luncheon. I suppose you got our card."

"He might have come after I came in," said Mrs. Dallow.

"Dear Julia, I'm going to see you to-night. I've been waiting for that," Nick rejoined.

"Of course *we* had no idea when you would come in," said Lady Agnes.

"I'm so sorry. You must come to-morrow. I hate calls at night," Julia remarked.

"Well, then, will you roam with me? Will you wander through Paris on my arm?" Nick asked, smiling. "Will you take a drive with me?"

"Oh, that would be perfection!" cried Grace.

"I thought we were all going somewhere—to the Hippodrome, Peter," said Biddy.

"Oh, not all; just you and me!" laughed Peter.

"I am going home to my bed. I've earned my rest," Lady Agnes sighed.

"Can't Peter take *us*?" asked Grace. "Nick can take you home, mamma, if Julia won't receive him, and I can look perfectly after Peter and Biddy."

"Take them to something amusing; please take them,"



Mrs. Dallow said to her brother. Her voice was kind, but had the expectation of assent in it, and Nick observed both the indulgence and the pressure. "You're tired, poor dear," she continued to Lady Agnes. "Fancy your being dragged about so! What did you come over for?"

"My mother came because I brought her," Nick said. "It's I who have dragged her about. I brought her for a little change. I thought it would do her good. I wanted to see the Salon."

"It isn't a bad time. I have a carriage, and you must use it; you must use nothing else. It will take you everywhere. I will drive you about to-morrow." Julia dropped these words in the same perfunctory, casual way as any others; but Nick had already noted, and he noted now afresh, with pleasure, that her abruptness was perfectly capable of conveying a benevolence. It was quite sufficiently manifest to him that for the rest of the time she might be near his mother she would do her numberless good turns. She would give things to the girls—he had a private adumbration of that; expensive Parisian, perhaps not perfectly useful things.

Lady Agnes was a woman who measured reciprocities and distances; but she was both too subtle and too just not to recognize the smallest manifestation that might count, either technically or essentially, as a service. "Dear Julia!" she exclaimed, responsively; and her tone made this brevity of acknowledgment sufficient. What Julia had said was all she wanted. "It's so interesting about Harsh," she added. "We're immensely excited."

"Yes, Nick looks it. *Merci, pas de vin.* It's just the thing for you, you know."

"To be sure he knows it. He's immensely grateful. It's really very kind of you."

"You do me a very great honour, Julia," said Nick.

"Don't be tiresome!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallow.

"We'll talk about it later. Of course there are lots of points," Nick pursued. "At present let us be purely convivial. Somehow Harsh is such a false note here. *A tout à l'heure!*"

"My dear fellow, you've caught exactly the tone of Mr. Gabriel Nash," Peter Sherringham observed.

"Who is Mr. Gabriel Nash?" Mrs. Dallow asked.

"Nick, is he a gentleman? Biddy says so," Grace Dormer interposed before this inquiry was answered.

"It is to be supposed that any one Nick brings to lunch with us—" Lady Agnes murmured.

"Ah, Grace, with your tremendous standard!" her brother said; while Peter Sherringham replied to Julia that Mr. Nash was Nick's new Mentor or oracle; whom moreover she should see if she would come and have tea with him.

"I haven't the least desire to see him," Julia declared, "any more than I have to talk about Harsh and bore poor Peter."

"Oh, certainly, dear, you would bore me," said Sherringham.

"One thing at a time, then. Let us by all means be convivial. Only you must show me how," Mrs. Dallow went on to Nick. "What does he mean, Cousin Agnes? Does he want us to drain the wine-cup, to flash with repartee?"

"You'll do very well," said Nick. "You are charming, this evening."

"Do go to Peter's, Julia, if you want something exciting. You'll see a marvellous girl," Biddy broke in, with her smile on Peter.

"Marvellous for what?"

"For thinking she can act, when she can't," said the roguish Biddy.

"Dear me, what people you all know! I hate Peter's theatrical people."

"And aren't you going home, Julia?" Lady Agnes inquired.

"Home to the hotel?"

"Dear, no, to Harsh, to see about everything."

"I'm in the midst of telegrams. I don't know yet."

"I suppose there's no doubt they'll have him," Lady Agnes decided to pursue.

"Who will have whom?"

"Why, the local people—and the party; those who invite a gentleman to stand. I'm speaking of my son."

"They'll have the person I want them to have, I dare say. There are so many people in it, in one way or another, it's dreadful. I like the way you sit there," Mrs. Dallow added to Nick Dormer.

"So do I," he smiled back at her; and he thought she *was* charming now, because she was gay and easy and willing really, though she might plead incompetence, to understand how jocose a dinner in a pot-house in a foreign town might be. She was in good-humour, or she was going to be, and not grand, nor stiff, nor indifferent, nor haughty, nor any of the things that people who disliked her usually found her and sometimes even a little made him believe her. The spirit of

mirth, in some cold natures, manifests itself not altogether happily; their effort of recreation resembles too much the bath of the hippopotamus. But when Mrs. Dallow put her elbows on the table one felt she could be trusted to get them safely off again.

For a family in mourning the dinner was lively; the more so that before it was half over Julia had arranged that her brother, eschewing the inferior spectacle, should take the girls to the Théâtre Français. It was her idea, and Nick had a chance to observe how an idea was apt not to be successfully controverted when it was Julia's. Even the programme appeared to have been pre-arranged to suit it, just the thing for the cheek of the young person—"Il ne Faut Jurer de Rien" and "Mademoiselle de la Seiglière." Peter was all willingness, but it was Julia who settled it, even to sending for the newspaper (her brother, by a rare accident, was unconscious of the evening's bill), and to reassuring Biddy, who was happy but anxious, on the article of their not getting places, their being too late. Peter could always get places: a word from him and the best box was at his disposal. She made him write the word on a card, and saw that a messenger was despatched with it to the Rue de Richelieu; and all this was done without loudness or insistence, parenthetically and authoritatively. The box was bespoken; the carriage, as soon as they had had their coffee, was found to be there; Peter drove off in it with the girls, with the understanding that he was to send it back; Nick sat waiting for it, over the finished repast, with the two ladies, and then his mother was relegated to it and conveyed to her apartments:

and all the while it was Julia who governed the succession of events. "Do be nice to her," Lady Agnes murmured to him, as he placed her in the vehicle at the door of the restaurant; and he guessed that it gave her a comfort to have left him sitting there with Mrs. Dallow.

Nick had every disposition to be nice to her; if things went as she liked them it was an acknowledgment of a certain force that was in her—the force of assuming that they would. Julia had her differences—some of them were much for the better; and when she was in a mood like this evening's, liberally dominant, he was ready to encourage her assumptions. While they waited for the return of the carriage, which had rolled away with his mother, she sat opposite to him, with her elbows on the table, playing first with one and then with another of the objects that encumbered it: after five minutes of which she exclaimed, "Oh, I say, we'll go!" and got up abruptly, asking for her jacket. He said something about the carriage's having had orders to come back for them, and she replied: "Well, it can go away again!" She added: "I don't want a carriage; I want to walk;" and in a moment she was out of the place, with the people at the tables turning round again and the *caissière* swaying in her high seat. On the pavement of the boulevard she looked up and down: there were people at little tables, at the door; there were people all over the broad expanse of the asphalt; there was a profusion of light and a pervasion of sound; and everywhere, though the establishment at which they had been dining was not in the thick of the fray, the tokens of a great traffic of pleasure, that



night-aspect of Paris which represents it as a huge market for sensations. Beyond the Boulevard des Capucines it flared through the warm evening like a vast bazaar; and opposite the Café Durand the Madeleine rose theatrical, a high, clever *décor*, before the footlights of the Rue Royale. "Where shall we go, what shall we do?" Mrs. Dallow asked, looking at her companion and somewhat to his surprise, as he had supposed she only wanted to go home.

"Anywhere you like. It's so warm we might drive, instead of going indoors. We might go to the Bois. That would be agreeable."

"Yes, but it wouldn't be walking. However, that doesn't matter. It's mild enough for anything—for sitting out, like all these people. And I've never walked in Paris at night: it would amuse me."

Nick hesitated. "So it might, but it isn't particularly recommended to ladies."

"I don't care, if it happens to suit me."

"Very well, then, we'll walk to the Bastille, if you like."

Julia hesitated, on her side, still looking round her.

"It's too far; I'm tired; we'll sit here." And she dropped beside an empty table, on the "terrace" of M. Durand. "This will do; it's amusing enough, and we can look at the Madeleine; that's respectable. If we must have something we'll have a *madère*; is that respectable? Not particularly? So much the better. What are those people having? *Bocks*? Couldn't we have *bocks*? Are they very low? Then I shall have one. I've been so wonderfully good—I've been staying at Versailles: *je me dois bien cela*."



She insisted, but pronounced the thin liquid in the tall glass very disgusting when it was brought. Nick was amazed, reflecting that it was not for such a discussion as this that his mother had left him with such complacency; and indeed he too had, as she would have had, his share of perplexity, observing that nearly half an hour passed without his cousin's saying anything about Harsh.

Mrs. Dallow leaned back against the lighted glass of the café, comfortable and beguiled, watching the passers, the opposite shops, the movement of the square in front of them. She talked about London, about the news written to her in her absence, about Cannes and the people she had seen there, about her poor sister-in-law and her numerous progeny and two or three droll things that had happened at Versailles. She discoursed considerably about herself, mentioning certain things she meant to do on her return to town, her plans for the rest of the season. Her carriage came and stood there, and Nick asked if he should send it away; to which she said: "No, let it stand a bit." She let it stand a long time, and then she told him to dismiss it: they would walk home. She took his arm and they went along the boulevard, on the right hand side, to the Rue de la Paix, saying little to each other during the transit; and then they passed into the hotel and up to her rooms. All she had said on the way was that she was very tired of Paris. There was a shaded lamp in her *salon*, but the windows were open and the light of the street, with its undisturbing murmur, as if everything ran on india-rubber, came up through the interstices of the balcony and made a vague glow and a flitting of shadows on the ceiling.

Her maid appeared, busying herself a moment ; and when she had gone out Julia said suddenly to her companion : " Should you mind telling me what's the matter with you ? "

" The matter with me ? "

" Don't you want to stand ? "

" I'll do anything to oblige you. "

" Why should you oblige me ? "

" Why, isn't that the way people treat you ? " asked Nick.

" They treat me best when they are a little serious. "

" My dear Julia, it seems to me I'm serious enough. Surely it isn't an occasion to be so very solemn, the idea of going down into a stodgy little country town and talking a lot of rot. "

" Why do you call it ' rot ' ? "

" Because I can think of no other name that, on the whole, describes it so well. You know the sort of thing. Come ! you've listened to enough of it, first and last. One blushes for it when one sees it in print, in the local papers. The local papers—ah, the thought of them makes me want to stay in Paris. "

" If you don't speak well it's your own fault : you know how to, perfectly. And you usually do. "

" I always do, and that's what I'm ashamed of. I've got the cursed humbugging trick of it. I speak beautifully. I can turn it on, a fine flood of it, at the shortest notice. The better it is the worse it is, the kind is so inferior. It has nothing to do with the truth or the search for it ; nothing to do with intelligence, or candour, or honour. It's an appeal to everything that for one's self one despises, " the young man went on—" to stupidity, to ignorance, to density, to the love

of names and phrases, the love of hollow, idiotic words, of shutting the eyes tight and making a noise. Do men who respect each other or themselves talk to each other that way? They know they would deserve kicking if they were to attempt it. A man would blush to say to himself in the darkness of the night the things he stands up on a platform in the garish light of day to stuff into the ears of a multitude whose intelligence he pretends that he esteems." Nick Dormer stood at one of the windows, with his hands in his pockets. He had been looking out, but as his words followed each other faster he turned toward Mrs. Dallow, who had dropped upon a sofa with her face to the window. She had given her jacket and gloves to her maid, but had kept on her bonnet; and she leaned forward a little as she sat, with her hands clasped together in her lap and her eyes upon her companion. The lamp, in a corner, was so thickly veiled that the room was in tempered obscurity, lighted almost equally from the street, from the brilliant shop-fronts opposite. "Therefore, why be sapient and solemn about it, like an editorial in a newspaper?" Nick added, with a smile.

She continued to look at him for a moment after he had spoken; then she said: "If you don't want to stand, you have only to say so. You needn't give your reasons."

"It's too kind of you to let me off that! And then I'm a tremendous fellow for reasons; that's my strong point, don't you know? I've a lot more besides those I've mentioned, done up and ready for delivery. The odd thing is that they don't always govern my behaviour. I rather think I do want to stand."

"Then what you said just now was a speech," Mrs. Dallow rejoined.

"A speech?"

"The 'rot,' the humbug of the hustings."

"No, those great truths remain, and a good many others. But an inner voice tells me I'm in for it. And it will be much more graceful to embrace this opportunity, accepting your co-operation, than to wait for some other and forfeit that advantage."

"I shall be very glad to help you anywhere," said Mrs. Dallow.

"Thanks, awfully," murmured the young man, still standing there with his hands in his pockets. "You would do it best in your own place, and I have no right to deny myself such a help."

Julia smiled at him for an instant. "I don't do it badly."

"Ah, you're so political!"

"Of course I am; it's the only decent thing to be. But I can only help you if you'll help yourself. I can do a good deal, but I can't do everything. If you'll work I'll work with you; but if you are going into it with your hands in your pockets I'll have nothing to do with you." Nick instantly changed the position of these members, and sank into a seat with his elbows on his knees. "You're very clever, but you must really take a little trouble. Things don't drop into people's mouths."

"I'll try—I'll try. I have a great incentive," Nick said.

"Of course you have."

"My mother, my poor mother." Mrs. Dallow made a

slight exclamation, and he went on : " And of course, always, my father, dear man. My mother's even more political than you."

" I dare say she is, and quite right ! " said Mrs. Dallow.

" And she can't tell me a bit more than you can what she thinks, what she believes, what she desires."

" Excuse me, I can tell you perfectly. There's one thing I always desire—to keep out a Tory."

" I see ; that's a great philosophy."

" It will do very well. And I desire the good of the country. I'm not ashamed of that."

" And can you give me an idea of what it is—the good of the country ? "

" I know perfectly what it isn't. It isn't what the Tories want to do."

" What do they want to do ? "

" Oh, it would take me long to tell you. All sorts of trash."

" It would take you long, and it would take them longer ! All they want to do is to prevent *us* from doing. On our side, we want to prevent them from preventing us. That's about as clearly as we all see it. So, on one side and the other, it's a beautiful, lucid, inspiring programme."

" I don't believe in you," Mrs. Dallow replied to this, leaning back on her sofa.

" I hope not, Julia, indeed ! " He paused a moment, still with his face toward her and his elbows on his knees ; then he pursued : " You are a very accomplished woman and a very zealous one ; but you haven't an idea, you know—to call an

idea. What you mainly want is to be at the head of a political salon ; to start one, to keep it up, to make it a success."

"Much you know me!" Julia exclaimed ; but he could see through the dimness that she had coloured a little.

"You'll have it, in time, but I won't come to it," Nick went on.

"You can't come less than you do."

"When I say you'll have it, I mean you've already got it. That's why I don't come."

"I don't think you know what you mean," said Mrs. Dallow. "I have an idea that's as good as any of yours, any of those you have treated me to this evening, it seems to me—the simple idea that one ought to do something or other for one's country."

"‘Something or other’ certainly covers all the ground. There is one thing one can always do for one's country, which is not to be afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

Nick Dormer hesitated a moment, laughing ; then he said : "I'll tell you another time. It's very well to talk so glibly of standing," he added ; "but it isn't absolutely foreign to the question that I haven't got the cash."

"What did you do before?" asked Mrs. Dallow.

"The first time, my father paid."

"And the other time?"

"Oh, Mr. Carteret."

"Your expenses won't be at all large ; on the contrary," said Julia.



"They sha'n't be ; I shall look out sharp for that. I shall have the great Hutchby."

"Of course ; but, you know, I want you to do it well." She paused an instant, and then : "Of course you can send the bill to me."

"Thanks, awfully ; you're tremendously kind. I shouldn't think of that." Nick Dormer got up as he said these words, and walked to the window again, his companion's eyes resting upon him as he stood for a moment with his back to her. "I shall manage it somehow," he went on.

"Mr. Carteret will be delighted," said Julia.

"I dare say, but I hate taking people's money."

"That's nonsense, when it's for the country. Isn't it for *them* ?"

"When they get it back !" Nick replied, turning round and looking for his hat. "It's startlingly late ; you must be tired." Mrs. Dallow made no response to this, and he pursued his quest, successful only when he reached a duskier corner of the room, to which the hat had been relegated by his cousin's maid. "Mr. Carteret will expect so much, if he pays. And so would you."

"Yes, I'm bound to say I should !" And Mrs. Dallow emphasized this assertion by the way she rose erect. "If you're only going in to lose, you had better stay out."

"How can I lose, with you?" the young man asked, smiling. She uttered a word, impatiently but indistinguishably, and he continued : "And even if I do, it will have been immense fun."

"It is immense fun," said Julia. "But the best fun is to win. If you don't—"

"If I don't?" he repeated, as she hesitated.

"I'll never speak to you again."

"How much you expect, even when you don't pay!"

Mrs. Dallow's rejoinder was a justification of this remark, embodying as it did the fact that if they should receive on the morrow certain information on which she believed herself entitled to count, information tending to show that the Tories meant to fight the seat hard, not to lose it again, she should look to him to be in the field as early as herself. Sunday was a lost day; she should leave Paris on Monday.

"Oh, they'll fight it hard; they'll put up Kingsbury," said Nick, smoothing his hat. "They'll all come down—all that can get away. And Kingsbury has a very handsome wife."

"She is not so handsome as your cousin," Mrs. Dallow hazarded.

"Oh dear, no—a cousin sooner than a wife, any day!" Nick laughed as soon as he had said this, as if the speech had an awkward side; but the reparation, perhaps, scarcely mended it, the exaggerated mock-meekness with which he added: "I'll do any blessed thing you tell me."

"Come here to-morrow, then, as early as ten." She turned round, moving to the door with him; but before they reached it she demanded, abruptly: "Pray, isn't a gentleman to do anything, to be anything?"

"To be anything?"

"If he doesn't aspire to serve the State."

“To make his political fortune, do you mean? Oh, bless me, yes, there are other things.”

“What other things, that can compare with that?”

“Well, I, for instance, I’m very fond of the arts.”

“Of the arts?”

“Did you never hear of them? I’m awfully fond of painting.”

At this Mrs. Dallow stopped short, and her fine gray eyes had for a moment the air of being set further forward in her head. “Don’t be odious! Good-night,” she said, turning away and leaving him to go.

## VII.

PETER SHERRINGHAM, the next day, reminded Nick that he had promised to be present with him at Madame Carré's interview with the ladies introduced to her by Gabriel Nash ; and in the afternoon, in accordance with this arrangement, the two men took their way to the Rue de Constantinople. They found Mr. Nash and his friends in the small beflounced drawing-room of the old actress, who, as they learned, had sent in a request for ten minutes' grace, having been detained at a lesson—a rehearsal of a *comédie de salon*, to be given, for a charity, by a fine lady, at which she had consented to be present as an adviser. Mrs. Rooth sat on a black satin sofa, with her daughter beside her, and Gabriel Nash wandered about the room, looking at the votive offerings which converted the little panelled box, decorated in sallow white and gold, into a theatrical museum : the presents, the portraits, the wreaths, the diadems, the letters, framed and glazed, the trophies and tributes and relics collected by Madame Carré during half a century of renown. The profusion of this testimony was hardly more striking than the confession of something missed, something hushed, which seemed to rise from it all and make it melancholy, like a reference to clappings which, in the nature of things, could now only be present as a silence : so that if

the place was full of history, it was the form without the fact, or at the most a redundancy of the one to a pinch of the other—the history of a mask, of a squeak, a record of movements in the air.

Some of the objects exhibited by the distinguished artist, her early portraits, in lithograph or miniature, represented the costume and embodied the manner of a period so remote that Nick Dormer, as he glanced at them, felt a quickened curiosity to look at the woman who reconciled being alive to-day with having been alive so long ago. Peter Sherringham already knew how she managed this miracle, but every visit he paid to her added to his amused, charmed sense that it *was* a miracle, that his extraordinary old friend had seen things that he should never, never see. Those were just the things he wanted to see most, and her duration, her survival, cheated him agreeably and helped him a little to guess them. His appreciation of the actor's art was so systematic that it had an antiquarian side, and at the risk of representing him as attached to a futility, it must be said that he had as yet hardly known a keener regret for anything than for the loss of that antecedent world, and in particular for his having come too late for the great *comédienne*, the light of the French stage in the early years of the century, of whose example and instruction Madame Carré had had the inestimable benefit. She had often described to him her rare predecessor, straight from whose hands she had received her most celebrated parts, and of whom her own manner was often a religious imitation; but her descriptions troubled him more than they consoled, only confirming his theory, to which so much of his observation had

already ministered, that the actor's art, in general, is going down and down, descending a slope with abysses of vulgarity at its foot, after having reached its perfection, more than fifty years ago, in the talent of the lady in question. He would have liked to dwell for an hour beneath the meridian.

Gabriel Nash introduced the new-comers to his companions ; but the younger of the two ladies gave no sign of lending herself to this transaction. The girl was very white ; she huddled there, silent and rigid, frightened to death, staring, expressionless. If Bridget Dormer had seen her at this moment she might have felt avenged for the discomfiture she had suffered the day before, at the Salon, under the challenging eyes of Maud Vavasour. It was plain at the present hour, that Miss Vavasour would have run away had she not felt that the persons present would prevent her escape. Her aspect made Nick Dormer feel as if the little temple of art in which they were collected had been the waiting-room of a dentist. Sherringham had seen a great many nervous girls trembling before the same ordeal, and he liked to be kind to them, to say things that would help them to do themselves justice. The probability, in a given case, was almost overwhelmingly in favour of their having any other talent one could think of in a higher degree than the dramatic ; but he could rarely forbear to interpose, even as against his conscience, to keep the occasion from being too cruel. There were occasions indeed that could scarcely be too cruel to punish properly certain examples of presumptuous ineptitude. He remembered what Mr. Nash had said about this blighted maiden, and perceived that though she might be inept she was now anything but



presumptuous. Gabriel fell to talking with Nick Dormer, and Peter addressed himself to Mrs. Rooth. There was no use as yet in saying anything to the girl; she was too scared even to hear. Mrs. Rooth, with her shawl fluttering about her, nestled against her daughter, putting out her hand to take one of Miriam's, soothingly. She had pretty, silly, near-sighted eyes, a long, thin nose and an upper lip which projected over the under as an ornamental cornice rests on its support. "So much depends—really everything!" she said in answer to some sociable observation of Sherringham's. "It's either this," and she rolled her eyes expressively about the room, "or it's—I don't know too much what!"

"Perhaps we're too many," Peter hazarded, to her daughter. "But really, you'll find, after you fairly begin, that you'll do better with four or five."

Before she answered she turned her head and lifted her fine eyes. The next instant he saw they were full of tears. The word she spoke, however, though uttered in a deep, serious tone, had not the note of sensibility: "Oh, I don't care for *you*!" He laughed at this, declared it was very well said and that if she could give Madame Carré such a specimen as that—! The actress came in before he had finished his phrase, and he observed the way the girl slowly got up to meet her, hanging her head a little and looking at her from under her brows. There was no sentiment in her face—only a kind of vacancy of terror which had not even the merit of being fine of its kind, for it seemed stupid and superstitious. Yet the head was good, he perceived at the same moment; it was strong and salient and made to tell at a distance. Madame

Carré scarcely noticed her at first, greeting her only in her order, with the others, and pointing to seats, composing the circle with smiles and gestures, as if they were all before the prompter's box. The old actress presented herself to a casual glance as a red-faced woman in a wig, with beady eyes, a hooked nose and pretty hands; but Nick Dormer, who had a perception of physiognomy, speedily observed that these free characteristics included a great deal of delicate detail—an eyebrow, a nostril, a flitting of expressions, as if a multitude of little facial wires were pulled from within. This accomplished artist had in particular a mouth which was visibly a rare instrument, a pair of lips whose curves and fine corners spoke of a lifetime of “points” unerringly made and verses exquisitely spoken, helping to explain the purity of the sound that issued from them. Her whole countenance had the look of long service—of a thing infinitely worn and used, drawn and stretched to excess, with its elasticity overdone and its springs relaxed, yet religiously preserved and kept in repair, like an old valuable time-piece, which might have quivered and rumbled, but could be trusted to strike the hour. At the first words she spoke Gabriel Nash exclaimed, endearingly: “*Ah, la voix de Célimène!*” Célimène, who wore a big red flower on the summit of her dense wig, had a very grand air, a toss of the head and sundry little majesties of manner; in addition to which she was strange, almost grotesque, and to some people would have been even terrifying, capable of re-appearing, with her hard eyes, as a queer vision in the darkness. She excused herself for having made the company wait, and mouthed and mimicked in the drollest way, with intonations

as fine as a flute, the performance and the pretensions of the *belles dames* to whom she had just been endeavouring to communicate a few of the rudiments. "*Mais celles-là, c'est une plaisanterie,*" she went on, to Mrs. Rooth; "whereas you and your daughter, *chère madame*—I am sure that you are quite another matter."

The girl had got rid of her tears and was gazing at her, and Mrs. Rooth leaned forward and said insinuatingly: "She knows four languages."

Madame Carré gave one of her histrionic stares, throwing back her head. "That's three too many. The thing is to do something with one of them."

"We're very much in earnest," continued Mrs. Rooth, who spoke excellent French.

"I'm glad to hear it—*il n'y a que ça. La tête est bien*—the head is very good," she said, looking at the girl. "But let us see, my dear child, what you've got in it!" The young lady was still powerless to speak; she opened her lips, but nothing came. With the failure of this effort she turned her deep, sombre eyes upon the three men. "*Un beau regard*—it carries well," Madame Carré hinted. But even as she spoke Miss Rooth's fine gaze was suffused again, and the next moment she had begun to weep. Nick Dormer sprung up; he felt embarrassed and intrusive—there was such an indelicacy in sitting there to watch a poor girl's struggle with timidity. There was a momentary confusion; Mrs. Rooth's tears were seen also to flow; Gabriel Nash began to laugh, addressing however at the same time the friendliest, most familiar encouragement to his companions, and Peter Sherringham offered to retire with Nick

on the spot, if their presence was oppressive to the young lady. But the agitation was over in a minute ; Madame Carré motioned Mrs. Rooth out of her seat and took her place beside the girl, and Gabriel Nash explained judiciously to the other men that she would be worse if they were to go away. Her mother begged them to remain, "so that there should be at least some English ;" she spoke as if the old actress were an army of Frenchwomen. The girl was quickly better, and Madame Carré, on the sofa beside her, held her hand and emitted a perfect music of reassurance. "The nerves, the nerves—they are half of our trade. Have as many as you like, if you've got something else too. *Voyons*—do you know anything ?"

"I know some pieces."

"Some pieces of the *répertoire* ?"

Miriam Rooth stared as if she didn't understand. "I know some poetry."

"English, French, Italian, German," said her mother.

Madame Carré gave Mrs. Rooth a look which expressed irritation at the recurrence of this announcement. "Does she wish to act in all those tongues ? The phrase-book isn't the comedy."

"It is only to show you how she has been educated."

"Ah, chère madame, there is no education that matters ! I mean save the right one. Your daughter must have a language, like me, like *ces messieurs*."

"You see if I can speak French," said the girl, smiling dimly at her hostess. She appeared now almost to have collected herself.

"You speak it in perfection."

"And English just as well," said Miss Rooth.

"You oughtn't to be an actress; you ought to be a governess."

"Oh, don't tell us that: it's to escape from that!" pleaded Mrs. Rooth.

"I'm very sure your daughter will escape from that," Peter Sherringham was moved to remark.

"Oh, if *you* could help her!" the lady exclaimed, pathetically.

"She has certainly all the qualities that strike the eye," said Peter.

"You are *most* kind, sir!" Mrs. Rooth declared, elegantly draping herself.

"She knows Célimène; I have heard her do Célimène," Gabriel Nash said to Madame Carré.

"And she knows Juliet, and Lady Macbeth, and Cleopatra," added Mrs. Rooth.

"*Voyons*, my dear child, do you wish to work for the French stage or for the English?" the old actress demanded.

"Ours would have sore need of you, Miss Rooth," Sherringham gallantly interposed.

"Could you speak to any one in London—could you introduce her?" her mother eagerly asked.

"Dear madam, I must hear her first, and hear what Madame Carré says."

"She has a voice of rare beauty, and I understand voices," said Mrs. Rooth.

"Ah, then, if she has intelligence she has every gift."

"She has a most poetic mind," the old lady went on.



"I should like to paint her portrait; she's made for that," Nick Dormer ventured to observe to Mrs. Rooth; partly because he was struck with the girl's capacity as a model, partly to mitigate the crudity of inexpressive spectatorship.

"So all the artists say. I have had three or four heads of her, if you would like to see them: she has been done in several styles. If you were to do her I am sure it would make her celebrated."

"And me too," said Nick, laughing.

"It would indeed, a member of Parliament!" Nash declared.

"Ah, I have the honour—?" murmured Mrs. Rooth, looking gratified and mystified.

Nick explained that she had no honour at all, and meanwhile Madame Carré had been questioning the girl. "Chère madame, I can do nothing with your daughter: she knows too much!" she broke out. "It's a pity, because I like to catch them wild."

"Oh, she's wild enough, if that's all! And that's the very point, the question of where to try," Mrs. Rooth went on. "Into what do I launch her—upon what dangerous, stormy sea? I've thought of it so anxiously."

"Try here—try the French public: they're so much the most serious," said Gabriel Nash.

"Ah, no, try the English: there's such a rare opening!" Sherringham exclaimed, in quick opposition.

"Ah, it isn't the public, dear gentlemen. It's the private side, the other people—it's the life—it's the moral atmosphere."

"*Je ne connais qu'une scène—la nôtre*," Madame Carré asserted. "I have been informed there is no other."



“And very correctly,” said Gabriel Nash. “The theatre in our countries is puerile and barbarous.”

“There is something to be done for it, and perhaps *mademoiselle* is the person to do it,” Sherringham suggested, contentiously.

“Ah, but, *en attendant*, what can it do for her?” Madame Carré asked.

“Well, anything that I can help it to do,” said Peter Sherringham, who was more and more struck with the girl’s rich type. Miriam Rooth sat in silence, while this discussion went on, looking from one speaker to the other with a suspended, literal air.

“Ah, if your part is marked out, I congratulate you, *mademoiselle*!” said the old actress, underlining the words as she had often underlined such words on the stage. She smiled with large permissiveness on the young aspirant, who appeared not to understand her. Her tone penetrated, however, to certain depths in the mother’s nature, adding another stir to agitated waters.

“I feel the responsibility of what she shall find in the life, the standards, of the theatre,” Mrs. Rooth explained. “Where is the purest tone—where are the highest standards? that’s what I ask,” the good lady continued, with a persistent candour which elicited a peal of unceremonious but sociable laughter from Gabriel Nash.

“The purest tone—*qu’est-ce-que-c’est que ça?*” Madame Carré demanded, in the finest manner of modern comedy.

“We are very, *very* respectable,” Mrs. Rooth went on, smiling and achieving lightness, too. “What I want to do is

to place my daughter where the conduct—and the picture of conduct, in which she should take part—wouldn't be absolutely dreadful. Now, *chère madame*, how about all that? how about the conduct in the French theatre—the things she should see, the things she should hear?"

"I don't think I know what you are talking about. They are the things she may see and hear everywhere; only they are better done, they are better said. The only conduct that concerns an actress, it seems to me, is her own, and the only way for her to behave herself is not to be a stick. I know no other conduct."

"But there are characters, there are situations, which I don't think I should like to see *her* undertake."

"There are many, no doubt, which she would do well to leave alone!" laughed the Frenchwoman.

"I shouldn't like to see her represent a very bad woman—a *really* bad one," Mrs. Rooth serenely pursued.

"Ah, in England, then, and in your theatre, every one is good? Your plays must be even more ingenious than I supposed."

"We haven't any plays," said Gabriel Nash.

"People will write them for Miss Rooth—it will be a new era," Peter Sherringham rejoined, with wanton, or at any rate combative, optimism.

"Will *you*, sir—will you do something? A sketch of some truly noble female type?" the old lady asked, engagingly.

"Oh, I know what you do with our pieces—to show your superior virtue!" Madame Carré broke in, before he had time to reply that he wrote nothing but diplomatic memoranda.

“Bad women? *Je n’ai joué que ça, madame.* ‘Really’ bad? I tried to make them real!”

“I can say ‘L’Aventurière,’” Miriam interrupted, in a cold voice which seemed to hint at a want of participation in the maternal solitudes.

“Confer on us the pleasure of hearing you, then. Madame Carré will give you the *réplique*,” said Peter Sherringham.

“Certainly, my child; I can say it without the book,” Madame Carré responded: “Put yourself there—move that chair a little away.” She patted her young visitor, encouraging her to rise, settling with her the scene they should take, while the three men sprang up to arrange a place for the performance. Miriam left her seat and looked vaguely round her; then, having taken off her hat and given it to her mother, she stood on the designated spot with her eyes on the ground. Abruptly, however, instead of beginning the scene, Madame Carré turned to the elder lady with an air which showed that a rejoinder to this visitor’s remarks of a moment before had been gathering force in her breast.

“You mix things up, *chère madame*, and I have it on my heart to tell you so. I believe it’s rather the case with you other English, and I have never been able to learn that either your morality or your talent is the gainer by it. To be too respectable to go where things are done best is, in my opinion, to be very vicious indeed; and to do them badly in order to preserve your virtue is to fall into a grossness more shocking than any other. To do them well is virtue enough, and not to make a mess of it the only respectability. That’s hard enough to merit Paradise. Everything else is

base humbug! Voilà, chère madame, the answer I have for your scruples!"

"It's admirable—admirable; and I am glad my friend Dormer here has had the great advantage of hearing you utter it!" Gabriel Nash exclaimed, looking at Nick.

Nick thought it, in effect, a speech denoting an intelligence of the question, but he rather resented the idea that Nash should assume that it would strike him as a revelation; and to show his familiarity with the line of thought it indicated, as well as to play his part appreciatively in the little circle, he observed to Mrs. Rooth, as if they might take many things for granted: "In other words, your daughter must find her safeguard in the artistic conscience." But he had no sooner spoken than he was struck with the oddity of their discussing so publicly, and under the poor girl's nose, the conditions which Miss Rooth might find the best for the preservation of her personal integrity. However, the anomaly was light and unoppressive—the echoes of a public discussion of delicate questions seemed to linger so familiarly in the egotistical little room. Moreover the heroine of the occasion evidently was losing her embarrassment; she was the priestess on the tripod, awaiting the afflatus and thinking only of that. Her bared head, of which she had changed the position, holding it erect, while her arms hung at her sides, was admirable; and her eyes gazed straight out of the window, at the houses on the opposite side of the Rue de Constantinople.

Mrs. Rooth had listened to Madame Carré with startled, respectful attention, but Nick, considering her, was very sure that she had not understood her hostess's little lesson. Yet

this did not prevent her from exclaiming in answer to him :  
“Oh, a fine artistic life—what indeed is more beautiful?”

Peter Sherringham had said nothing ; he was watching Miriam and her attitude. She wore a black dress, which fell in straight folds ; her face, under her mobile brows, was pale and regular, with a strange, strong, tragic beauty. “I don’t know what’s in her,” he said to himself ; “nothing, it would seem, from her persistent vacancy. But such a face as that, such a head, is a fortune !” Madame Carré made her commence, giving her the first line of the speech of Clorinde : “*Vous ne me fuyez pas, mon enfant, aujourd’hui.*” But still the girl hesitated, and for an instant she appeared to make a vain, convulsive effort. In this effort she frowned portentously ; her low forehead overhung her eyes ; the eyes themselves, in shadow, stared, splendid and cold, and her hands clinched themselves at her sides. She looked austere and terrible, and during this moment she was an incarnation the vividness of which drew from Sherringham a stifled cry. “*Elle est bien belle—ah, ça !*” murmured the old actress ; and in the pause which still preceded the issue of sound from the girl’s lips Peter turned to his kinsman and said in a low tone :

“You must paint her just like that.”

“Like that ?”

“As the Tragic Muse.”

She began to speak ; a long, strong, colourless voice came quavering from her young throat. She delivered the lines of Clorinde, in the fine interview with Célie, in the third act of the play, with a rude monotony, and then, gaining confidence, with an effort at modulation which was not altogether successful



and which evidently she felt not to be so. Madame Carré sent back the ball without raising her hand, repeating the speeches of Célie, which her memory possessed from their having so often been addressed to her, and uttering the verses with soft, communicative art. So they went on through the scene, and when it was over it had not precisely been a triumph for Miriam Rooth. Sherringham forbore to look at Gabriel Nash, and Madame Carré said: "I think you have a voice, *ma fille*, somewhere or other. We must try and put our hand on it." Then she asked her what instruction she had had, and the girl, lifting her eyebrows, looked at her mother, while her mother prompted her.

"Mrs. Delamere, in London; she was once an ornament of the English stage. She gives lessons just to a very few; it's a great favour. Such a very nice person! But above all, Signor Ruggieri—I think he taught us most." Mrs. Rooth explained that this gentleman was an Italian tragedian, in Rome, who instructed Miriam in the proper manner of pronouncing his language, and also in the art of declaiming and gesticulating.

"Gesticulating, I'll warrant," said their hostess. "They mimic as if for the deaf, they emphasize as if for the blind. Mrs. Delamere is doubtless an epitome of all the virtues, but I never heard of her. You travel too much," Madame Carré went on; "that's very amusing, but the way to study is to stay at home, to shut yourself up and hammer at your scales." Mrs. Rooth complained that they had no home to stay at; in rejoinder to which the old actress exclaimed: "Oh, you English, you are *d'une légèreté à faire rougir*. If you haven't



a home you must make one. In our profession it's the first requisite."

"But where? That's what I ask!" said Mrs. Rooth.

"Why not here?" Sherringham inquired.

"Oh, here!" And the good lady shook her head, with a world of suggestions.

"Come and live in London, and then I shall be able to paint your daughter," Nick Dormer interposed.

"Is that all that it will take, my dear fellow?" asked Gabriel Nash.

"Ah, London is full of memories," Mrs. Rooth went on. "My father had a great house there—we always came up. But all that's over."

"Study here, and go to London to appear," said Peter Sherringham, feeling frivolous even as he spoke.

"To appear in French?"

"No, in the language of Shakespeare."

"But we can't study that here."

"Monsieur Sherringham means that he will give you lessons," Madame Carré explained. "Let me not fail to say it—he's an excellent critic."

"How do you know that—you who are perfect?" asked Sherringham: an inquiry to which the answer was forestalled by the girl's rousing herself to make it public that she could recite the "Nights" of Alfred de Musset.

"Diable!" said the actress, "that's more than I can! But by all means give us a specimen."

The girl again placed herself in position and rolled out a fragment of one of the splendid conversations of Musset's

poet with his muse—rolled it loudly and proudly, tossed it and tumbled it about the room. Madame Carré watched her at first, but after a few moments she shut her eyes, though the best part of the business was to look. Sherringham had supposed Miriam was abashed by the flatness of her first performance, but now he perceived that she could not have been conscious of this; she was rather exhilarated and emboldened. She made a muddle of the divine verses, which, in spite of certain sonorities and cadences, an evident effort to imitate a celebrated actress, a comrade of Madame Carré, whom she had heard declaim them, she produced as if she had but a dim idea of their meaning. When she had finished Madame Carré passed no judgment; she only said, "Perhaps you had better say something English." She suggested some little piece of verse—some fable, if there were fables in English. She appeared but scantily surprised to hear that there were not—it was a language of which one expected so little. Mrs. Rooth said, "She knows her Tennyson by heart. I think he's more profound than La Fontaine;" and after some deliberation and delay Miriam broke into "The Lotos-Eaters," from which she passed directly, almost breathlessly, to "Edward Gray." Sherringham had by this time heard her make four different attempts, and the only generalization which could be very present to him was that she uttered these dissimilar compositions in exactly the same tone—a solemn, droning, dragging measure, adopted with an intention of pathos, a crude idea of "style." It was funereal, and at the same time it was rough and childish. Sherringham thought her English performance less futile than her French, but

he could see that Madame Carré listened to it with even less pleasure. In the way the girl wailed forth some of her Tennysonian lines he detected a possibility of a thrill. But the further she went, the more violently she acted on the nerves of Mr. Gabriel Nash: that also he could discover, from the way this gentleman ended by slipping discreetly to the window and leaning there, with his head out and his back to the exhibition. He had the art of mute expression; his attitude said, as clearly as possible: "No, no, you can't call me either ill-mannered or ill-natured. I'm the showman of the occasion, moreover, and I avert myself, leaving you to judge. If there's a thing in life I hate, it's this idiotic new fashion of the drawing-room recitation, and the insufferable creatures who practise it, who prevent conversation and whom, as they are beneath it, you can't punish by criticism. Therefore what I am is only too magnanimous—bringing these benighted women here, paying with my person, stifling my just repugnance."

At the same time that Sherringham pronounced privately that the manner in which Miss Rooth had acquitted herself offered no element of interest, he remained conscious that something surmounted and survived her failure, something that would perhaps be worth taking hold of. It was the element of outline and attitude, the way she stood, the way she turned her eyes, her head, and moved her limbs. These things held the attention; they had a natural felicity and, in spite of their suggesting too much the school-girl in the *tableau-vivant*, a sort of grandeur. Her face, moreover, grew as he watched it; something delicate dawned in it, a dim promise of

variety and a touching plea for patience, as if it were conscious of being able to show in time more expressions than the simple and striking gloom which, as yet, had mainly graced it. In short the plastic quality of her person was the only definite sign of a vocation. He almost hated to have to recognize this; he had seen that quality so often when it meant nothing at all that he had come at last to regard it as almost a guarantee of incompetence. He knew Madame Carré valued it, by itself, so little that she counted it out in measuring an histrionic nature; when it was not accompanied with other properties which helped and completed it she was near considering it as a positive hindrance to success—success of the only kind that she esteemed. Far oftener than he, she had sat in judgment on young women for whom hair and eyebrows and a disposition for the statuesque would have worked the miracle of attenuating their stupidity if the miracle were workable. But that particular miracle never was. The qualities she deemed most interesting were not the gifts, but the conquests—the effects the actor had worked hard for, had wrested by unwearying study. Sherringham remembered to have had, in the early part of their acquaintance, a friendly dispute with her on this subject; he having been moved at that time to defend the cause of the gifts. She had gone so far as to say that a serious comedian ought to be ashamed of them—ashamed of resting his case on them; and when Sherringham had cited Mademoiselle Rachel as a great artist whose natural endowment was rich and who had owed her highest triumphs to it, she had declared that Rachel was the very instance that proved her point—a talent em-

bodying one or two primary aids, a voice and an eye, but essentially formed by work, unremitting and ferocious work. "I don't care a straw for your handsome girls," she said; "but bring me the one who is ready to drudge the tenth part of the way Rachel drudged, and I'll forgive her her beauty. Of course, *notez bien*, Rachel wasn't a *bête*: that's a gift, if you like!"

Mrs. Rooth, who was evidently very proud of the figure her daughter had made, appealed to Madame Carré, rashly and serenely, for a verdict; but fortunately this lady's voluble *bonne* came rattling in at the same moment with the tea-tray. The old actress busied herself in dispensing this refreshment, an hospitable attention to her English visitors, and under cover of the diversion thus obtained, while the others talked together, Sherringham said to his hostess: "Well, is there anything in her?"

"Nothing that I can see. She's loud and coarse."

"She's very much afraid; you must allow for that."

"Afraid of me, immensely, but not a bit afraid of her authors—nor of you!" added Madame Carré, smiling.

"Aren't you prejudiced by what Mr. Nash has told you?"

"Why prejudiced? He only told me she was very handsome."

"And don't you think she is?"

"Admirable. But I'm not a photographer nor a dress-maker. I can't do anything with that."

"The head is very noble," said Peter Sherringham. "And the voice, when she spoke English, had some sweet tones."

"Ah, your English—possibly! All I can say is that I



listened to her conscientiously, and I didn't perceive in what she did a single *nuance*, a single inflection or intention. But not one, *mon cher*. I don't think she's intelligent."

"But don't they often seem stupid at first?"

"Say always!"

"Then don't some succeed—even when they are handsome?"

"When they are handsome they always succeed—in one way or another."

"You don't understand us English," said Peter Sherringham.

Madame Carré drank her tea; then she replied: "Marry her, my son, and give her diamonds. Make her an ambassador; she will look very well."

"She interests you so little that you don't care to do anything for her?"

"To do anything?"

"To give her a few lessons."

The old actress looked at him a moment: after which, rising from her place near the table on which the tea had been served, she said to Miriam Rooth: "My dear child, I give my voice for the *scène anglaise*. You did the English things best."

"Did I do them well?" asked the girl.

"You have a great deal to learn; but you have force. The principal things *sont encore à dégager*, but they will come. You must work."

"I think she has ideas," said Mrs. Rooth.

"She gets them from you," Madame Carré replied.



"I must say, if it's to be *our* theatre I'm relieved. I think it's safer," the good lady continued.

"Ours is dangerous, no doubt."

"You mean you are more severe," said the girl.

"Your mother is right," the actress smiled; "you have ideas."

"But what shall we do then—how shall we proceed?" Mrs. Rooth inquired.

She made this appeal, plaintively and vaguely, to the three gentlemen; but they had collected a few steps off and were talking together, so that it failed to reach them.

"Work—work—work!" exclaimed the actress.

"In English. I can play Shakespeare. I want to play Shakespeare," Miriam remarked.

"That's fortunate, as in English you haven't any one else to play."

"But he's so great—and he's so pure!" said Mrs. Rooth.

"That also seems very fortunate for you," Madame Carré phrased.

"You think me actually pretty bad, don't you?" the girl demanded, with her serious face.

"*Mon Dieu, que vous dirai-je?* Of course you're rough; but so was I, at your age. And if you find your voice it may carry you far. Besides, what does it matter what I think? How can I judge for your English public?"

"How shall I find my voice?" asked Miriam Rooth.

"By trying. Il n'y a que ça. Work like a horse, night and day. Besides, M. Sherringham, as he says, will help you."

Sherringham, hearing his name, turned round, and the girl appealed to him. "Will you help me, really?"

“To find her voice,” Madame Carré interposed.

“The voice, when it’s worth anything, comes from the heart ; so I suppose that’s where to look for it,” Gabriel Nash suggested.

“Much you know ; you haven’t got any !” Miriam retorted, with the first scintillation of gaiety she had shown on this occasion.

“Any voice, my child ?” Mr. Nash inquired.

“Any heart—or any manners !”

Peter Sherringham made the secret reflection that he liked her better when she was lugubrious ; for the note of pertness was not totally absent from her mode of emitting these few words. He was irritated, moreover, for in the brief conference he had just had with the young lady’s introducer he had had to face the necessity of saying something optimistic about her, which was not particularly easy. Mr. Nash had said with his bland smile, “And what impression does my young friend make ?” to which it appeared to Sherringham that uncomfortable consistency compelled him to reply that there was evidently a good deal in her. He was far from being sure of that. At the same time the young lady, both with the exaggerated “points” of her person and the poverty of her instinct of expression, constituted a kind of challenge—presented herself to him as a subject for inquiry, a problem, a piece of work, an explorable country. She was too bad to jump at, and yet she was too individual to overlook, especially when she rested her tragic eyes on him with the appeal of her deep “Really ?” This appeal sounded as if it were in a certain way to his honour, giving him a chance to brave

verisimilitude, to brave ridicule even, a little, in order to show, in a special case, what he had always maintained in general, that the direction of a young person's studies for the stage may be an interest of as high an order as any other artistic consideration.

"Mr. Nash has rendered us the great service of introducing us to Madame Carré, and I'm sure we're immensely indebted to him," Mrs. Rooth said to her daughter, with an air affectionately corrective.

"But what good does that do us?" the girl asked, smiling at the actress and gently laying her finger-tips upon her hand. "Madame Carré listens to me with adorable patience and then sends me about my business—in the prettiest way in the world."

"Mademoiselle, you are not so rough; the tone of that is very *juste*. A la bonne heure; work—work!" the actress exclaimed. "There was an inflection there, or very nearly. Practise it till you've got it."

"Come and practise it to me, if your mother will be so kind as to bring you," said Peter Sherringham.

"Do you give lessons—do you understand?" Miriam asked.

"I'm an old playgoer, and I have unbounded belief in my own judgment."

"'Old,' sir, is too much to say," Mrs. Rooth remonstrated. "My daughter knows your high position, but she is very direct. You will always find her so. Perhaps you'll say there are less honourable faults. We'll come to see you with pleasure. Oh, I've been at the Embassy, when I was her age. Therefore why shouldn't she go to-day? That was in Lord Davenant's time."

"A few people are coming to tea with me to-morrow. Perhaps you will come then, at five o'clock."

"It will remind me of the dear old times," said Mrs. Rooth.

"Thank you; I'll try and do better to-morrow," Miriam remarked, very sweetly.

"You do better every minute!" Sherringham exclaimed, looking at Madame Carré in emphasis of this declaration.

"She is finding her voice," the actress responded.

"She is finding a friend!" cried Mrs. Rooth.

"And don't forget, when you come to London, my hope that you'll come and see *me*," Nick Dormer said to the girl.

"To try and paint you—that would do me good!"

"She is finding even two," said Madame Carré.

"It's to make up for one I've lost!" And Miriam looked with very good stage-scorn at Gabriel Nash. "It's he that thinks I'm bad."

"You say that to make me drive you home; you know it will," Nash returned.

"We'll all take you home; why not?" Sherringham asked.

Madame Carré looked at the handsome girl, handsomer than ever at this moment, and at the three young men who had taken their hats and stood ready to accompany her. A deeper expression came for an instant into her hard, bright eyes, while she sighed: "*Ah, la jeunesse!* you'd always have that, my child, if you were the greatest goose on earth!"

### VIII.

AT Peter Sherringham's, the next day, Miriam Rooth had so evidently come with the expectation of "saying" something that it was impossible such a patron of the drama should forbear to invite her, little as the exhibition at Madame Carré's could have contributed to render the invitation prompt. His curiosity had been more appeased than stimulated, but he felt none the less that he had "taken up" the dark-browed girl and her reminiscential mother and must face the immediate consequences of the act. This responsibility weighed upon him during the twenty-four hours that followed the ultimate dispersal of the little party at the door of the Hôtel de la Garonne.

On quitting Madame Carré's the two ladies had gracefully declined Mr. Nash's offered cab and had taken their way homeward on foot, with the gentlemen in attendance. The streets of Paris at that hour were bright and episodical, and Sherringham trod them good-humouredly enough, and not too fast, leaning a little to talk to the young lady as he went. Their pace was regulated by their mother's, who walked in advance, on the arm of Gabriel Nash (Nick Dormer was on her other side), in refined deprecation. Her sloping back was before them, exempt from retentive stiffness in spite of her



rigid principles, with the little drama of her lost and recovered shawl perpetually going on.

Sherringham said nothing to the girl about her performance or her powers ; their talk was only of her manner of life with her mother—their travels, their *pensions*, their economies, their want of a home, the many cities she knew well, the foreign tongues and the wide view of the world she had acquired. He guessed easily enough the dolorous type of exile of the two ladies, wanderers in search of Continental cheapness, inured to queer contacts and compromises, “remarkably well connected” in England, but going out for their meals. The girl was but indirectly communicative, not, apparently, from any intention of concealment, but from the habit of associating with people whom she didn’t honour with her confidence. She was fragmentary and abrupt, as well as not in the least shy, subdued to dread of Madame Carré as she had been for the time. She gave Sherringham a reason for this fear, and he thought her reason innocently pretentious. “She admired a great artist more than anything in the world ; and in the presence of art, of *great* art, her heart beat so fast.” Her manners were not perfect, and the friction of a varied experience had rather roughened than smoothed her. She said nothing that showed that she was clever, though he guessed that this was the intention of two or three of her remarks ; but he parted from her with the suspicion that she was, according to the contemporary French phrase, a “nature.”

The Hôtel de la Garonne was in a small, unrenovated street, in which the cobble-stones of old Paris still flourished, lying



between the Avenue de l'Opéra and the Place de la Bourse. Sherringham had occasionally passed through this dim by-way, but he had never noticed the tall, stale *maison meublée*, whose aspect, that of a third-rate provincial inn, was an illustration of Mrs. Rooth's shrunken standard.

"We would ask you to come up, but it's quite at the top and we haven't a sitting-room," the poor lady bravely explained. "We had to receive Mr. Nash at a *café*."

Nick Dormer declared that he liked *cafés*, and Miriam, looking at his cousin, dropped with a flash of passion the demand: "Do you wonder that I should want to do something, so that we can stop living like pigs?"

Sherringham recognized eventually, the next day, that though it might be rather painful to listen to her it was better to make her recite than to let her do nothing, so effectually did the presence of his sister and that of Lady Agnes, and even of Grace and Biddy, appear, by a sort of tacit opposition, to deprive hers, ornamental as it was, of a reason. He had only to see them all together to perceive that she couldn't pass for having come to "meet" them—even her mother's insinuating gentility failed to put the occasion on that footing—and that she must therefore be assumed to have been brought to show them something. She was not subdued nor colourless enough to sit there for nothing, or even for conversation (the sort of conversation that was likely to come off), so that it was inevitable to treat her position as connected with the principal place on the carpet, with silence and attention and the pulling together of chairs. Even when so established it struck him at first as precarious, in the light or the darkness

of the inexpressive faces of the other ladies, sitting in couples and rows on sofas (there were several in addition to Julia and the Dormers; mainly the wives, with their husbands, of Sherringham's fellow-secretaries), scarcely one of whom he felt that he might count upon to say something gushing when the girl should have finished.

Miss Rooth gave a representation of Juliet drinking her potion, according to the system, as her mother explained, of the famous Signor Ruggieri—a scene of high, fierce sound, of many cries and contortions: she shook her hair (which proved magnificent) half down before the performance was over. Then she declaimed several short poems by Victor Hugo, selected, among many hundred, by Mrs. Rooth, as the good lady was careful to make known. After this she jumped to the American lyre, regaling the company with specimens, both familiar and fresh, of Longfellow, Lowell, Whittier, Holmes, and of two or three poetesses revealed to Sherringham on this occasion. She flowed so copiously, keeping the floor and rejoicing visibly in her opportunity, that Sherringham was mainly occupied with wondering how he could make her leave off. He was surprised at the extent of her repertory, which, in view of the circumstance that she could never have received much encouragement—it must have come mainly from her mother, and he didn't believe in Signor Ruggieri—denoted a very stiff ambition and a kind of misplaced perseverance. It was her mother who checked her at last, and he found himself suspecting that Gabriel Nash had intimated to the old woman that interference was necessary. For himself he was chiefly glad that Madame Carré was not there. It was present

to him that she would have deemed the exhibition, with its badness, its assurance, the absence of criticism, almost indecent.

His only new impression of the girl was that of this same high assurance—her coolness, her complacency, her eagerness to go on. She had been deadly afraid of the old actress, but she was not a bit afraid of a cluster of *femmes du monde*, of Julia, of Lady Agnes, of the smart women of the Embassy. It was positively these personages who were rather frightened; there was certainly a moment when even Julia was scared, for the first time that he had ever seen her. The space was too small; the cries, the rushes of the dishevelled girl were too near. Lady Agnes, much of the time, wore the countenance she might have worn at the theatre during a play in which pistols were fired; and indeed the manner of the young reciter had become more spasmodic, more explosive. It appeared, however, that the company in general thought her very clever and successful; which showed, to Sherringham's sense, how little they understood the matter. Poor Biddy was immensely struck, and grew flushed and absorbed as Miriam, at her best moments, became pale and fatal. It was she who spoke to her first, after it was agreed that they had better not fatigue her any more; she advanced a few steps, happening to be near her, murmuring: "Oh, thank you, thank you so much. I never saw anything so beautiful, so grand."

She looked very red and very pretty as she said this. Peter Sherringham liked her enough to notice and to like her better when she looked prettier than usual. As he turned away he heard Miriam answer, with rather an ungracious

irrelevance : "I have seen you before, three days ago, at the Salon, with Mr. Dormer. Yes, I know he's your brother. I have made his acquaintance since. He wants to paint my portrait. Do you think he'll do it well?" He was afraid Miriam was something of a brute, and also somewhat grossly vain. This impression would perhaps have been confirmed if a part of the rest of the short conversation of the two girls had reached his ear. Biddy ventured to remark that she herself had studied modelling a little and that she could understand how any artist would think Miss Rooth a splendid subject. If, indeed, *she* could attempt her head, that would be a chance to do something.

"Thank you," said Miriam, with a laugh. "I think I had rather not *passer par toute la famille!*" Then she added : "If your brother's an artist, I don't understand how he's in Parliament."

"Oh, he isn't in Parliament now ; we only hope he will be."

"Oh, I see."

"And he isn't an artist, either," Biddy felt herself conscientiously bound to subjoin.

"Then he isn't anything," said Miss Rooth.

"Well—he's immensely clever."

"Oh, I see," Miss Rooth again replied. "Mr. Nash has puffed him up so."

"I don't know Mr. Nash," said Biddy, guilty of a little dryness, and also of a little misrepresentation, and feeling rather snubbed.

"Well, you needn't wish to."

Biddy stood with her a moment longer, still looking at her

and not knowing what to say next, but not finding her any less handsome because she had such odd manners. Biddy had an ingenious little mind, which always tried as much as possible to keep different things separate. It was pervaded now by the observation, made with a certain relief, that if the girl spoke to her with such unexpected familiarity of Nick she said nothing at all about Peter. Two gentlemen came up, two of Peter's friends, and made speeches to Miss Rooth of the kind, Biddy supposed, that people learned to make in Paris. It was also doubtless in Paris, the girl privately reasoned, that they learned to listen to them as this striking performer listened. She received their advances very differently from the way she had received Biddy's. Sherringham noticed his young kinswoman turn away, still blushing, to go and sit near her mother again, leaving Miriam engaged with the two men. It appeared to have come over Biddy that for a moment she had been strangely spontaneous and bold and had paid a little of the penalty. The seat next her mother was occupied by Mrs. Rooth, toward whom Lady Agnes's head had inclined itself with a preoccupied air of benevolence. He had an idea that Mrs. Rooth was telling her about the Neville-Nugents of Castle Nugent, and that Lady Agnes was thinking it odd she never had heard of them. He said to himself that Biddy was generous. She had urged Julia to come, in order that they might see how bad the strange young woman would be; but now that she turned out so dazzling she forgot this calculation and rejoiced in what she innocently supposed to be her triumph. She kept away from Julia, however; she didn't even look at her to invite her also to confess that, in



vulgar parlance, they had been sold. He himself spoke to his sister, who was leaning back, in rather a detached way, in the corner of a sofa, saying something which led her to remark in reply: "Ah, I dare say it's extremely fine, but I don't care for tragedy when it treads on one's toes. She's like a cow who has kicked over the milking-pail. She ought to be tied up!"

"My poor Julia, it isn't extremely fine; it isn't fine at all," Sherringham rejoined, with some irritation.

"Excuse me. I thought that was why you invited us."

"I thought she was different," Sherringham said.

"Ah, if you don't care for her, so much the better. It has always seemed to me that you make too much of those people."

"Oh, I do care for her in a way, too. She's interesting." His sister gave him a momentary mystified glance, and he added, "And she's awful!" He felt stupidly annoyed, and he was ashamed of his annoyance, for he could have assigned no reason for it. It didn't make it less, for the moment, to see Gabriel Nash approach Mrs. Dallow, introduced by Nick Dormer. He gave place to the two young men with a certain alacrity, for he had a sense of being put in the wrong, in respect to the heroine of the occasion, by Nash's very presence. He remembered that it had been a part of their bargain, as it were, that he should present that gentleman to his sister. He was not sorry to be relieved of the office by Nick, and he even, tacitly and ironically, wished his cousin's friend joy of a colloquy with Mrs. Dallow. Sherringham's life was spent with people, he was used to people, and both as a host and as a guest he carried them, in general,



lightly. He could observe, especially in the former capacity, without uneasiness, take the temperature without anxiety. But at present his company oppressed him; he felt himself nervous, which was the thing in the world that he had always held to be least an honour to a gentleman dedicated to diplomacy. He was vexed with the levity in himself which had made him call them together on so poor a pretext, and yet he was vexed with the stupidity in them which made them think, as they evidently did, that the pretext was sufficient. He inwardly groaned at the precipitancy with which he had saddled himself with the Tragic Muse (a tragic muse who was noisy and pert), and yet he wished his visitors would go away and leave him alone with her.

Nick Dormer said to Mrs. Dallow that he wanted her to know an old friend of his, one of the cleverest men he knew; and he added the hope that she would be gentle and encouraging with him: he was so timid and so easily disconcerted.

Gabriel Nash dropped into a chair by the arm of Julia's sofa, Nick Dormer went away, and Mrs. Dallow turned her glance upon her new acquaintance without a perceptible change of position. Then she emitted, with rapidity, the remark: "It's very awkward when people are told one is clever."

"It's awkward if one isn't," said Mr. Nash, smiling.

"Yes, but so few people are—enough to be talked about."

"Isn't that just the reason why such a matter, such an exception, ought to be mentioned to them?" asked Gabriel Nash. "They mightn't find it out for themselves. Of course, however, as you say, there ought to be a certainty; then they

are surer to know it. Dormer's a dear fellow, but he's rash and superficial."

Mrs. Dallow, at this, turned her glance a second time upon her interlocutor ; but during the rest of the conversation she rarely repeated the movement. If she liked Nick Dormer extremely (and it may without further delay be communicated to the reader that she did), her liking was of a kind that opposed no difficulty whatever to her not liking (in case of such a complication) a person attached or otherwise belonging to him. It was not in her nature to extend tolerances to others for the sake of an individual she loved : the tolerance was usually consumed in the loving ; there was nothing left over. If the affection that isolates and simplifies its object may be distinguished from the affection that seeks communications and contacts for it, Julia Dallow's belonged wholly to the former class. She was not so much jealous as rigidly direct. She desired no experience for the familiar and yet partly mysterious kinsman in whom she took an interest that she would not have desired for herself ; and, indeed, the cause of her interest in him was partly the vision of his helping her to the particular emotion that she did desire—the emotion of great affairs and of public action. To have such ambitions for him appeared to her the greatest honour she could do him ; her conscience was in it as well as her inclination, and her scheme, in her conception, was noble enough to varnish over any disdain she might feel for forces drawing him another way. She had a prejudice, in general, against his connections, a suspicion of them and a supply of unwrought contempt ready for them. It was a singular circumstance that she was sceptical

even when, knowing her as well as he did, he thought them worth recommending to her: the recommendation indeed inveterately confirmed the suspicion.

This was a law from which Gabriel Nash was condemned to suffer, if suffering could on any occasion be predicated of Gabriel Nash. His pretension was, in truth, that he had purged his life of such incongruities, though probably he would have admitted that if a sore spot remained the hand of a woman would be sure to touch it. In dining with her brother and with the Dormers, two evenings before, Mrs. Dallow had been moved to exclaim that Peter and Nick knew the most extraordinary people. As regards Peter the attitude-inizing girl and her mother now pointed that moral with sufficient vividness; so that there was little arrogance in taking a similar quality for granted in the conceited man at her elbow, who sat there as if he would be capable, from one moment to another, of leaning over the arm of her sofa. She had not the slightest wish to talk with him about himself, and was afraid, for an instant, that he was on the point of passing from the chapter of his cleverness to that of his timidity. It was a false alarm, however, for instead of this he said something about the pleasures of the monologue, as the distraction that had just been offered was called by the French. He intimated that in his opinion these pleasures were mainly for the performers. They had all, at any rate, given Miss Rooth a charming afternoon; that, of course, was what Miss Dallow's kind brother had mainly intended in arranging the little party. (Mrs. Dallow hated to hear him call her brother "kind"; the term seemed offensively

patronizing.) But he himself, he related, was now constantly employed in the same beneficence, listening, two-thirds of his time, to "intonations" and shrieks. She had doubtless observed it herself, how the great current of the age, the adoration of the mime, was almost too strong for any individual; how it swept one along and hurled one against the rocks. As she made no response to this proposition Gabriel Nash asked her if she had not been struck with the main sign of the time, the preponderance of the mountebank, the glory and renown, the personal favour, that he enjoyed. Hadn't she noticed what an immense part of the public attention he held, in London at least? For in Paris society was not so pervaded with him, and the women of the profession, in particular, were not in every drawing-room.

"I don't know what you mean," Mrs. Dallow said. "I know nothing of any such people."

"Aren't they under your feet wherever you turn—their performances, their portraits, their speeches, their autobiographies, their names, their manners, their ugly mugs, as the people say, and their idiotic pretensions?"

"I dare say it depends on the places one goes to. If they're everywhere"—and Mrs. Dallow paused a moment—"I don't go everywhere."

"I don't go anywhere, but they mount on my back, at home, like the Old Man of the Sea. Just observe a little when you return to London," Nash continued, with friendly instructiveness. Mrs. Dallow got up at this—she didn't like receiving directions; but no other corner of the room appeared to offer her any particular reason for crossing to it: she never

did such a thing without a great inducement. So she remained standing there, as if she were quitting the place in a moment, which indeed she now determined to do ; and her interlocutor, rising also, lingered beside her, unencouraged but unperturbed. He went on to remark that Mr. Sherringham was quite right to offer Miss Rooth an afternoon's sport ; she deserved it as a fine, brave, amiable girl. She was highly educated, knew a dozen languages, was of illustrious lineage and was immensely particular.

"Immensely particular?" Mrs. Dallow repeated.

"Perhaps I should say that her mother is, on her behalf. Particular about the sort of people they meet—the tone, the standard. I'm bound to say they're like you : they don't go everywhere. That spirit is meritorious ; it should be recognized and rewarded."

Mrs. Dallow said nothing for a moment ; she looked vaguely round the room, but not at Miriam Rooth. Nevertheless she presently dropped, in allusion to her, the words : "She's dreadfully vulgar."

"Ah, don't say that to my friend Dormer!" Gabriel Nash exclaimed.

"Are you and he such great friends?" Mrs. Dallow asked, looking at him.

"Great enough to make me hope we shall be greater."

Again, for a moment, she said nothing ; then she went on—

"Why shouldn't I say to him that she's vulgar?"

"Because he admires her so much ; he wants to paint her."

"To paint her?"

"To paint her portrait."



"Oh, I see. I dare say she'd do for that."

Gabriel Nash laughed gaily. "If that's your opinion of her you are not very complimentary to the art he aspires to practise."

"He aspires to practise?" Mrs. Dallow repeated.

"Haven't you talked with him about it? Ah, you must keep him up to it!"

Julia Dallow was conscious, for a moment, of looking uncomfortable; but it relieved her to demand of her neighbour, in a certain tone, "Are you an artist?"

"I try to be," Nash replied, smiling; "but I work in such a difficult material."

He spoke this with such a clever suggestion of unexpected reference that, in spite of herself, Mrs. Dallow said after him—

"Difficult material?"

"I work in life!"

At this Mrs. Dallow turned away, leaving Nash the impression that she probably misunderstood his speech, thinking he meant that he drew from the living model, or some such platitude: as if there could have been any likelihood that he drew from the dead one. This, indeed, would not fully have explained the abruptness with which she dropped their conversation. Gabriel Nash, however, was used to sudden collapses, and even to sudden ruptures, on the part of his interlocutors, and no man had more the secret of remaining gracefully with his ideas on his hands. He saw Mrs. Dallow approach Nick Dormer, who was talking with one of the ladies of the Embassy, and apparently signify to him that she wished to speak to him.



He got up, they had a minute's conversation, and then he turned and took leave of his fellow-visitor. Mrs. Dallow said a word to her brother, Dormer joined her, and then they came together to the door. In this movement they had to pass near Nash, and it gave her an opportunity to nod good-bye to him, which he was by no means sure she would have done if Nick had not been with her. The young man stopped a moment; he said to Nash: "I should like to see you this evening, late; you must meet me somewhere."

"We'll take a walk—I should like that," Nash replied. "I shall smoke a cigar at the café on the corner of the Place de l'Opéra; you'll find me there." Gabriel prepared to compass his own departure, but before doing so he addressed himself to the duty of saying a few words of civility to Lady Agnes. This proved difficult, for on one side she was defended by the wall of the room and on the other rendered inaccessible by Miriam's mother, who clung to her with a quickly-rooted fidelity, showing no symptom of desistance. Gabriel compromised on her daughter Grace, who said to him:

"You were talking with my cousin, Mrs. Dallow."

"To her rather than with her," Nash smiled.

"Ah, she's very charming," said Grace.

"She's very beautiful," Nash rejoined.

"And very clever," Miss Dormer continued.

"Very, very intelligent." His conversation with the young lady went little further than this, and he presently took leave of Peter Sherringham; remarking to him, as he shook hands, that he was very sorry for him. But he had courted his fate.

"What do you mean by my fate?" Sherringham asked.

"You've got them for life."

"Why for life, when I now lucidly and courageously recognize that she isn't good?"

"Ah, but she'll become so," said Gabriel Nash.

"Do you think that?" Sherringham inquired, with a candour which made his visitor laugh.

"*You* will—that's more to the purpose!" Gabriel exclaimed, as he went away.

Ten minutes later Lady Agnes substituted a general vague assent to all further particular ones and, with her daughters, withdrew from Mrs. Rooth and from the rest of the company. Peter had had very little talk with Biddy, but the girl kept her disappointment out of her pretty eyes and said to him:

"You told us she didn't know how—but she does!" There was no suggestion of disappointment in this.

Sherringham held her hand a moment. "Ah, it's you who know how, dear Biddy!" he answered; and he was conscious that if the occasion had been more private he would lawfully have kissed her.

Presently three others of his guests departed, and Mr. Nash's assurance that he had them for life recurred to him as he observed that Mrs. Rooth and her daughter quite failed to profit by so many examples. The Lovicks remained—a colleague and his sociable wife—and Peter gave them a hint that they were not to leave him absolutely alone with the two ladies. Miriam quitted Mrs. Lovick, who had attempted, with no great subtlety, to engage her, and came up to Sherringham as if she suspected him of a design of stealing from the room and had the idea of preventing it.

"I want some more tea : will you give me some more ? I feel quite faint. You don't seem to suspect how that sort of thing takes it out of you."

Sherringham apologized, extravagantly, for not having seen that she had the proper quantity of refreshment, and took her to the round table, in a corner, on which the little collation had been served. He poured out tea for her and pressed bread-and-butter on her, and *petits fours*, of all which she profusely and methodically partook. It was late ; the afternoon had faded and a lamp had been brought in, the wide shade of which shed a fair glow upon the tea-service, the little plates of comestibles. The Lovicks sat with Mrs. Rooth at the other end of the room, and the girl stood at the table drinking her tea and eating her bread-and-butter. She consumed these articles so freely that he wondered if she had been in serious want of food—if they were so poor as to have to count with that sort of privation. This supposition was softening, but still not so much so as to make him ask her to sit down. She appeared indeed to prefer to stand : she looked better so, as if the freedom, the conspicuity of being on her feet and treading a stage were agreeable to her. While Sherringham lingered near her, vaguely, with his hands in his pockets, not knowing exactly what to say and instinctively avoiding, now, the theatrical question (there were moments when he was plentifully tired of it), she broke out, abruptly : "Confess that you think me intolerably bad !"

"Intolerably—no."

"Only tolerably ! I think that's worse."

"Every now and then you do something very clever," Sherringham said.

"How many such things did I do to-day?"

"Oh, three or four. I don't know that I counted very carefully."

She raised her cup to her lips, looking at him over the rim of it—a proceeding which gave her eyes a strange expression. "It bores you, and you think it disagreeable," she said in a moment—"a girl always talking about herself." He protested that she could never bore him, and she went on: "Oh, I don't want compliments—I want the truth. An actress has to talk about herself; what else can she talk about, poor vain thing?"

"She can talk sometimes about other actresses."

"That comes to the same thing. You won't be serious. I'm awfully serious." There was something that caught his attention in the way she said this—a longing, half-hopeless, half-argumentative, to be believed in. "If one really wants to do anything one must worry it out; of course everything doesn't come the first day," she pursued. "I can't see everything at once; but I can see a little more—step by step—as I go: can't I?"

"That's the way—that's the way," said Sherringham. "If you see the things to do, the art of doing them will come, if you hammer away. The great point is to see them."

"Yes; and you don't think me clever enough for that."

"Why do you say so, when I've asked you to come here on purpose?"

"You've asked me to come, but I've had no success."

"On the contrary; every one thought you wonderful."

"Oh, they don't know!" said Miriam Rooth. "You've not said a word to me. I don't mind your not having praised me;

that would be too *banal*. But if I'm bad—and I know I'm dreadful—I wish you would talk to me about it."

"It's delightful to talk to you," Sherringham said.

"No, it isn't, but it's kind," she answered, looking away from him.

Her voice had a quality, as she uttered these words, which made him exclaim, "Every now and then you say something—!"

She turned her eyes back to him, smiling. "I don't want it to come by accident." Then she added: "If there's any good to be got from trying, from showing one's self, how can it come unless one hears the simple truth, the truth that turns one inside out? It's all for that—to know what one is, if one's a stick!"

"You have great courage, you have rare qualities," said Sherringham. She had begun to touch him, to seem different: he was glad she had not gone.

For a moment she made no response to this, putting down her empty cup and looking vaguely over the table, as if to select something more to eat. Suddenly she raised her head and broke out with vehemence: "I will, I will, I will!"

"You'll do what you want, evidently."

"I will succeed—I will be great. Of course I know too little, I've seen too little. But I've always liked it; I've never liked anything else. I used to learn things, and to do scenes, and to rant about the room, when I was five years old." She went on, communicative, persuasive, familiar, egotistical (as was necessary), and slightly common, or perhaps only natural; with reminiscences, reasons and anecdotes, an unexpected



profusion, and with an air of comradeship, of freedom of intercourse, which appeared to plead that she was capable at least of embracing that side of the profession she desired to adopt. He perceived that if she had seen very little, as she said, she had also seen a great deal; but both her experience and her innocence had been accidental and irregular. She had seen very little acting—the theatre was always too expensive. If she could only go often—in Paris, for instance, every night for six months—to see the best, the worst, everything, she would make things out, she would observe and learn what to do, what not to do: it would be a kind of school. But she couldn't, without selling the clothes off her back. It was vile and disgusting to be poor; and if ever she were to know the bliss of having a few francs in her pocket she would make up for it—that she could promise! She had never been acquainted with any one who could tell her anything—if it was good or bad, or right or wrong—except Mrs. Delamere and poor Ruggieri. She supposed they had told her a great deal, but perhaps they hadn't, and she was perfectly willing to give it up if it was bad. Evidently Madame Carré thought so; she thought it was horrid. Wasn't it perfectly divine, the way the old woman had said those verses, those speeches of Célie? If she would only let her come and listen to her once in a while, like that, it was all she would ask. She had got lots of ideas, just from that; she had practised them over, over and over again, the moment she got home. He might ask her mother—he might ask the people next door. If Madame Carré didn't think she could work she might have heard something that would show her. But she didn't think her

even good enough to criticize ; for that wasn't criticism, telling her her head was good. Of course her head was good ; she didn't need travel up to the *quartiers excentriques* to find that out. It was her mother—the way she talked—who gave that idea, that she wanted to be elegant, and very moral, and a *femme du monde*, and all that sort of trash. Of course that put people off, when they were only thinking of the right way. Didn't *she* know, Miriam herself, that that was the only thing to think of ? But any one would be kind to her mother who knew what a dear she was. “ She doesn't know when it's right or wrong, but she's a perfect saint,” said the girl, obscuring considerably her vindication. “ She doesn't mind when I say things over by the hour, dinning them into her ears while she sits there and reads. She's a tremendous reader ; she's awfully up in literature. She taught me everything herself—I mean all that sort of thing. Of course I'm not so fond of reading ; I go in for the book of life.” Sherringham wondered whether her mother had not, at any rate, taught her that phrase, and thought it highly probable. “ It would give on *my* nerves, the life I lead her,” Miriam continued ; “ but she's really a delicious woman.”

The oddity of this epithet made Sherringham laugh, and altogether, in a few minutes, which is perhaps a sign that he abused his right to be a man of moods, the young lady had produced a revolution of curiosity in him, re-awakened his sympathy. Her mixture, as it spread itself before one, was a quickening spectacle : she was intelligent and clumsy—she was underbred and fine. Certainly she was very various, and that was rare ; not at all at this moment the heavy-eyed,

frightened creature who had pulled herself together with such an effort at Madame Carré's, nor the elated "phenomenon" who had just been declaiming, nor the rather affected and contradictory young person with whom he had walked home from the Rue de Constantinople. Was this succession of phases a sign that she really possessed the celebrated artistic temperament, the nature that made people provoking and interesting? That Sherringham himself was of that shifting complexion is perhaps proved by his odd capacity for being of two different minds at very nearly the same time. Miriam was pretty now, with likeable looks and charming usual eyes. Yes, there were things he could do for her; he had already forgotten the chill of Mr. Nash's irony, of his prophecy. He was even scarcely conscious how much, in general, he detested hints, insinuations, favours asked obliquely and plaintively: that was doubtless also because the girl was so pretty and so fraternizing. Perhaps indeed it was unjust to qualify it as roundabout, the manner in which Miss Rooth conveyed to him that it was open to him not only to pay for lessons for her, but to meet the expense of her nightly attendance, with her mother, at instructive exhibitions of theatrical art. It was a large order, sending the pair to all the plays; but what Sherringham now found himself thinking about was not so much its largeness as that it would be rather interesting to go with them sometimes and point the moral (the technical one), showing her the things he liked, the things he disapproved. She repeated her declaration that she recognized the fallacy of her mother's views about "noble" heroines and about the importance of her looking out for such tremendously proper

people. "One must let her talk, but of course it creates a prejudice," she said, with her eyes on Mr. and Mrs. Lovick, who had got up, terminating their communion with Mrs. Rooth. "It's a great muddle, I know, but she can't bear anything coarse—and quite right, too. I shouldn't, either, if I didn't have to. But I don't care where I go if I can act, or who they are if they'll help me. I want to act—that's what I want to do; I don't want to meddle in people's affairs. I can look out for myself—I'm all right!" the girl exclaimed, roundly, frankly, with a ring of honesty which made her crude and pure. "As for doing the bad ones, I'm not afraid of that."

"The bad ones?"

"The bad women, in the plays—like Madame Carré. I'll do anything."

"I think you'll do best what you are," remarked Sherringham, laughing. "You're a strange girl."

"*Je crois bien!* Doesn't one have to be, to want to go and exhibit one's self to a loathsome crowd, on a platform, with trumpets and a big drum, for money—to parade one's body and one's soul?"

Sherringham looked at her a moment: her face changed constantly; now there was a little flush and a noble delicacy in it.

"Give it up; you're too good for it," he said, abruptly.

"Never, never—never till I'm pelted!"

"Then stay on here a bit; I'll take you to the theatres."

"Oh, you dear!" Miriam delightedly exclaimed. Mr. and Mrs. Lovick, accompanied by Mrs. Rooth, now crossed the

room to them, and the girl went on, in the same tone :  
"Mamma, dear, he's the best friend we've ever had ; he's a great deal nicer than I thought."

"So are you, mademoiselle," said Peter Sherringham.

"Oh, I trust Mr. Sherringham—I trust him infinitely," Mrs. Rooth returned, covering him with her mild, respectable, wheedling eyes. "The kindness of every one has been beyond everything. Mr. and Mrs. Lovick can't say enough. They make the most obliging offers ; they want you to know their brother."

"Oh, I say, he's no brother of mine," Mr. Lovick protested, good-naturedly.

"They think he'll be so suggestive, he'll put us up to the right things," Mrs. Rooth went on.

"It's just a little brother of mine—such a dear, clever boy," Mrs. Lovick explained.

"Do you know she has got nine ? Upon my honour she has !" said her husband. "This one is the sixth. Fancy if I had to take them over !"

"Yes, it makes it rather awkward," Mrs. Lovick amiably conceded. "He has gone on the stage, poor dear boy ; he acts rather well."

"He tried for the diplomatic service, but he didn't precisely dazzle his examiners," Mr. Lovick remarked.

"Edmund's very nasty about him. There are lots of gentlemen on the stage ; he's not the first."

"It's such a comfort to hear that," said Mrs. Rooth.

"I'm much obliged to you. Has he got a theatre ?" Miriam asked.



"My dear young lady, he hasn't even got an engagement," replied the young man's unsympathizing brother-in-law.

"He hasn't been at it very long, but I'm sure he'll get on. He's immensely in earnest, and he's very good-looking. I just said that if he should come over to see us you might rather like to meet him. He might give you some tips, as my husband says."

"I don't care for his looks, but I *should* like his tips," said Miriam, smiling.

"And *is* he coming over to see you?" asked Sherringham, to whom, while this exchange of remarks, which he had not lost, was going on, Mrs. Rooth had, in lowered accents, addressed herself.

"Not if I can help it, I think!" Mr. Lovick declared, but so jocosely that it was not embarrassing.

"Oh, sir, I'm sure you're fond of him," Mrs. Rooth remonstrated, as the party passed together into the ante-chamber.

"No, really, I like some of the others—four or five of them; but I don't like Arty."

"We'll make it up to him, then; *we'll* like him," Miriam declared, gaily; and her voice rang in the staircase (Sherringham went a little way with them), with a charm which her host had not perceived in her sportive note the day before.

## IX.

NICK DORMER found his friend Nash, that evening, on the spot he had designated, smoking a cigar in the warm, bright night, in front of the café at the corner of the square before the Opera. He sat down with him, but at the end of five minutes he uttered a protest against the crush and confusion, the publicity and vulgarity, of the place, the shuffling procession of the crowd, the jostle of fellow-customers, the perpetual brush of waiters. "Come away. I want to talk to you, and I can't talk here," he said to his companion. "I don't care where we go. It will be pleasant to walk; we'll stroll away to the *quartiers sérieux*. Each time I come to Paris, at the end of three days, I take the boulevard, with its conventional grimace, into greater disfavour. I hate even to cross it, I go half a mile round to avoid it."

The young men took their course together down the Rue de la Paix to the Rue de Rivoli, which they crossed, passing beside the gilded railing of the Tuileries. The beauty of the night—the only defect of which was that the immense illumination of Paris kept it from being quite night enough, made it a sort of bedizened, rejuvenated day—gave a charm to the quieter streets, drew our friends away to the right, to the river and the bridges, the older, duskier city. The pale

ghost of the palace that had died by fire hung over them awhile, and, by the passage now open at all times across the garden of the Tuileries, they came out upon the Seine. They kept on and on, moving slowly, smoking, talking, pausing, stopping to look, to emphasize, to compare. They fell into discussion, into confidence, into inquiry, sympathetic or satiric, and into explanation which needed in turn to be explained. The balmy night, the time for talk, the amusement of Paris, the memory of young confabulations gave a quality to the occasion. Nick had already forgotten the little brush he had had with Mrs. Dallow, when they quitted Peter's tea-party together, and that he had been almost disconcerted by the manner in which she characterized the odious man he had taken it into his head to present to her. Impertinent and fatuous she had called him; and when Nick began to explain that he was really neither of these things, though he could imagine his manner might sometimes suggest them, she had declared that she didn't wish to argue about him or even to hear of him again. Nick had not counted on her liking Gabriel Nash, but he had thought it wouldn't matter much if she should dislike him a little. He had given himself the diversion, which he had not dreamed would be cruel to any one concerned, of seeing what she would make of a type she had never encountered before. She had made even less than he expected, and her implication that he had played her a trick had been irritating enough to prevent him from reflecting that the fault might have been in some degree with Nash. But he had recovered from his resentment sufficiently to ask this personage, with every possible circumstance of implied

consideration for the lady, what *he*, on his side, had made of his charming cousin.

"Upon my word, my dear fellow, I don't regard that as a fair question," was the answer. "Besides, if you think Mrs. Dallow charming, what on earth need it matter to you what I think? The superiority of one man's opinion over another's is never so great as when the opinion is about a woman."

"It was to help me to find out what I think of yourself," said Nick Dormer.

"Oh, that you'll never do. I shall bother you to the end. The lady with whom you were so good as to make me acquainted is a beautiful specimen of the English garden-flower, the product of high cultivation and much tending; a tall, delicate stem, with the head set upon it in a manner which, as I recall it, is distinctly so much to the good in my day. She's the perfect type of the object *raised*, or bred, and everything about her is homogeneous, from the angle of her elbow to the way she drops that vague, conventional, dry little 'Oh!' which dispenses with all further performance. That sort of completeness is always satisfying. But I didn't satisfy her, and she didn't understand me. I don't think they usually understand."

"She's no worse than I, then."

"Ah, she didn't try."

"No, she doesn't try. But she probably thought you conceited, and she would think so still more if she were to hear you talk about her trying."

"Very likely—very likely," said Gabriel Nash. "I have an idea a good many people think that. It appears to me so droll. I suppose it's a result of my little system."

“Your little system?”

“Oh, it’s nothing wonderful. Only the idea of being just the same to every one. People have so bemuddled themselves that the last thing they can conceive is that one should be simple.”

“Lord, do you call yourself simple?” Nick ejaculated.

“Absolutely; in the sense of having no interest of my own to push, no nostrum to advertise, no power to conciliate, no axe to grind. I’m not a savage—ah, far from it—but I really think I’m perfectly independent.”

“Oh, that’s always provoking!” laughed Nick.

“So it would appear, to the great majority of one’s fellow-mortals; and I well remember the pang with which I originally made that discovery. It darkened my spirit, at a time when I had no thought of evil. What we like, when we are unregenerate, is that a new-comer should give us a password, come over to our side, join our little camp or religion, get into our little boat, in short, whatever it is, and help us to row it. It’s natural enough; we are mostly in different tubs and cockles, paddling for life. Our opinions, our convictions and doctrines and standards, are simply the particular thing that will make the boat go—*our* boat, naturally, for they may very often be just the thing that will sink another. If you won’t get in, people generally hate you.”

“Your metaphor is very lame,” said Nick; “it’s the overcrowded boat that goes to the bottom.”

“Oh, I’ll give it another leg or two! Boats can be big, in the infinite of space, and a doctrine is a raft that floats the better the more passengers it carries. A passenger jumps over



from time to time, not so much from fear of sinking as from a want of interest in the course or the company. He swims, he plunges, he dives, he dips down and visits the fishes and the mermaids and the submarine caves; he goes from craft to craft and splashes about, on his own account, in the blue, cool water. The regenerate, as I call them, are the passengers who jump over in search of better fun. I turned my summersault long ago."

"And now, of course, you're at the head of the regenerate; for, in your turn, you all form a select school of porpoises."

"Not a bit, and I know nothing about heads, in the sense you mean. I've grown a tail, if you will; I'm the merman wandering free. It's a delightful trade!"

Before they had gone many steps further Nick Dormer stopped short and said to his companion: "I say, my dear fellow, do you mind mentioning to me whether you are the greatest humbug and charlatan on earth, or a genuine intelligence, one that has sifted things for itself?"

"I do puzzle you—I'm so sorry," Nash replied, benignly. "But I'm very sincere. And I *have* tried to straighten out things a bit for myself."

"Then why do you give people such a handle?"

"Such a handle?"

"For thinking you're an—for thinking you're not wise."

"I dare say it's my manner; they're so unused to candour."

"Why don't you try another?" Nick inquired.

"One has the manner that one can; and mine, moreover, is a part of my little system."

"Ah, if you've got a little system you're no better than any one else," said Nick, going on.

"I don't pretend to be better, for we are all miserable sinners; I only pretend to be bad in a pleasanter, brighter way, by what I can see. It's the simplest thing in the world; I just take for granted a certain brightness in life, a certain frankness. What is essentially kinder than that, what is more harmless? But the tradition of dreariness, of stodginess, of dull, dense, literal prose, has so sealed people's eyes that they have ended by thinking the most normal thing in the world the most fantastic. Why be dreary, in our little day? No one can tell me why, and almost every one calls me names for simply asking the question. But I keep on, for I believe one can do a little good by it. I want so much to do a little good," Gabriel Nash continued, taking his companion's arm. "My persistence is systematic: don't you see what I mean? I won't be dreary—no, no, no; and I won't recognize the necessity, or even, if there is any way out of it, the accident of dreariness in the life that surrounds me. That's enough to make people stare: they're so stupid!"

"They think you're impertinent," Dormer remarked.

At this his companion stopped him short, with an ejaculation of pain, and, turning his eyes, Nick saw under the lamps of the quay that he had brought a vivid blush into Nash's face. "I don't strike *you* that way?" Gabriel asked, reproachfully.

"Oh, me! Wasn't it just admitted that I don't in the least make you out?"

"That's the last thing!" Nash murmured, as if he were

thinking the idea over, with an air of genuine distress. "But with a little patience we'll clear it up together, if you care enough about it," he added, more cheerfully. He let his friend go on again and he continued: "Heaven help us all! what do people mean by impertinence? There are many, I think, who don't understand its nature or its limits; and upon my word I have literally seen mere quickness of intelligence or of perception, the jump of a step or two, a little whirr of the wings of talk, mistaken for it. Yes, I have encountered men and women, who thought you were impertinent if you were not so stupid as they. The only impertinence is aggression, and I indignantly protest that I am never guilty of *that* clumsiness. Ah, for what do they take one, with *their* presumptions? Even to defend myself, sometimes, I have to make believe to myself that I care. I always feel as if I didn't successfully make others think so. Perhaps they see an impertinence in that. But I dare say the offence is in the things that I take, as I say, for granted; for if one tries to be pleased one passes, perhaps inevitably, for being pleased above all with one's self. That's really not my case, for I find my capacity for pleasure deplorably below the mark I've set. That's why, as I have told you, I cultivate it, I try to bring it up. And I am actuated by positive benevolence; I have that pretension. That's what I mean by being the same to every one, by having only one manner. If one is conscious and ingenious to that end, what's the harm, when one's motives are so pure? By never, *never* making the concession, one may end by becoming a perceptible force for good."

“What concession are you talking about?” asked Nick Dormer.

“Why, that we are only here for dreariness. It’s impossible to grant it sometimes, if you wish to withhold it ever.”

“And what do you mean by dreariness? That’s modern slang, and it’s terribly vague. Many good things are dreary—virtue and decency and charity and perseverance and courage and honour.”

“Say at once that life is dreary, my dear fellow!” Gabriel Nash exclaimed.

“That’s on the whole my most usual impression.”

“*C’est là que je vous attends!* I’m precisely engaged in trying what can be done in taking it the other way. It’s my little personal experiment. Life consists of the personal experiments of each of us, and the point of an experiment is that it shall succeed. What we contribute is our treatment of the material, our rendering of the text, our style. A sense of the qualities of a style is so rare that many persons should doubtless be forgiven for not being able to read, or at all events to enjoy us; but is that a reason for giving it up—for not being, in this other sphere, if one possibly can, a Macaulay, a Ruskin, a Renan? Ah, we must write our best; it’s the great thing we can do in the world, on the right side. One has one’s form, *que diable*, and a mighty good thing that one has. I’m not afraid of putting all life into mine, without unduly squeezing it. I’m not afraid of putting in honour and courage and charity, without spoiling them: on the contrary, I’ll only do them good. People may not read you at sight, may not like you, but there’s a chance they’ll come round;

and the only way to court the chance is to keep it up—always to keep it up. That's what I do, my dear fellow, if you don't think I've perseverance. If some one likes it here and there, if you give a little impression of solidity, that's your reward; besides, of course, the pleasure for yourself."

"Don't you think your style is a little affected?" Nick asked, laughing, as they proceeded.

"That's always the charge against a personal manner; if you have any at all people think you have too much. Perhaps, perhaps—who can say? Of course one isn't perfect; but that's the delightful thing about art, that there is always more to learn and more to do; one can polish and polish and refine and refine. No doubt I'm rough still, but I'm in the right direction: I make it my business to take for granted an interest in the beautiful."

"Ah, the beautiful—there it stands, over there!" said Nick Dormer. "I am not so sure about yours—I don't know what I've got hold of. But Notre Dame *is* solid; Notre Dame *is* wise; on Notre Dame the distracted mind can rest. Come over and look at her!"

They had come abreast of the low island from which the great cathedral, disengaged to-day from her old contacts and adhesions, rises high and fair, with her front of beauty and her majestic mass, darkened at that hour, or at least simplified, under the stars, but only more serene and sublime for her happy union, far aloft, with the cool distance and the night. Our young men, gossiping as profitably as I leave the reader to estimate, crossed the wide, short bridge which made them face toward the monuments of old Paris—the Palais de



Justice, the Conciergerie, the holy chapel of Saint Louis. They came out before the church, which looks down on a square where the past, once so thick in the very heart of Paris, has been made rather a blank, pervaded, however, by the everlasting freshness of the great cathedral-face. It greeted Nick Dormer and Gabriel Nash with a kindness which the centuries had done nothing to dim. The lamplight of the great city washed its foundations, but the towers and buttresses, the arches, the galleries, the statues, the vast rose-window, the large, full composition, seemed to grow clearer as they climbed higher, as if they had a conscious benevolent answer for the upward gaze of men.

"How it straightens things out and blows away one's vapours—anything that's *done!*" said Nick; while his companion exclaimed, blandly and affectionately:

"The dear old thing!"

"The great point is to do something, instead of standing muddling and questioning; and, by Jove, it makes me want to!"

"Want to build a cathedral?" Nash inquired.

"Yes, just that."

"It's you who puzzle *me*, then, my dear fellow. You can't build them out of words."

"What is it the great poets do?" asked Nick.

"*Their* words are ideas—their words are images, enchanting collocations and unforgettable signs. But the verbiage of parliamentary speeches!"

"Well," said Nick, with a candid, reflective sigh, "you can rear a great structure of many things—not only of stones and

timbers and painted glass." They walked round Notre Dame, pausing, criticizing, admiring and discussing; mingling the grave with the gay and paradox with contemplation. Behind and at the sides the huge dusky vessel of the church seemed to dip into the Seine, or rise out of it, floating expansively—a ship of stone, with its flying buttresses thrown forth like an array of mighty oars. Nick Dormer lingered near it with joy, with a certain soothing content; as if it had been the temple of a faith so dear to him that there was peace and security in its precinct. And there was comfort too, and consolation of the same sort, in the company, at this moment, of Nash's equal response, of his appreciation, exhibited by his own signs, of the great effect. He felt it so freely and uttered his impression with such vividness that Nick was reminded of the luminosity his boyish admiration had found in him of old, the natural intelligence of everything of that kind. "Everything of that kind" was, in Nick's mind, the description of a wide and bright domain.

They crossed to the further side of the river, where the influence of the Gothic monument threw a distinction even over the Parisian smartnesses—the municipal rule and measure, the importunate symmetries, the "handsomeness" of everything, the extravagance of gaslight, the perpetual click on the neat bridges. In front of a quiet little café on the right bank Gabriel Nash said, "Let's sit down"—he was always ready to sit down. It was a friendly establishment and an unfashionable quarter, far away from the Grand Hôtel; there were the usual little tables and chairs on the quay, the muslin curtains behind the glazed front, the general sense of sawdust

and of drippings of watery beer. The place was subdued to stillness, but not extinguished, by the lateness of the hour; no vehicles passed, but only now and then a light Parisian foot. Beyond the parapet they could hear the flow of the Seine. Nick Dormer said it made him think of the old Paris, of the great Revolution, of Madame Roland, *quoi!* Gabriel Nash said they could have watery beer but were not obliged to drink it. They sat a long time; they talked a great deal, and the more they said the more the unsaid came up. Presently Nash found occasion to remark: "I go about my business, like any good citizen—that's all."

"And what *is* your business?"

"The spectacle of the world."

Nick laughed out. "And what do you do with that?"

"What does any one do with a spectacle? I look at it."

"You are full of contradictions and inconsistencies. You described yourself to me half an hour ago as an apostle of beauty."

"Where is the inconsistency? I do it in the broad light of day, whatever I do: that's virtually what I meant. If I look at the spectacle of the world I look in preference at what is charming in it. Sometimes I have to go far to find it—very likely; but that's just what I do. I go far—as far as my means permit me. Last year I heard of such a delightful little spot: a place where a wild fig-tree grows in the south wall, the outer side, of an old Spanish city. I was told it was a deliciously brown corner, with the sun making it warm in winter! As soon as I could I went there."

"And what did you do?"

"I lay on the first green grass—I liked it."

"If that sort of thing is all you accomplish you are not encouraging."

"I accomplish my happiness—it seems to me that's something. I have feelings, I have sensations: let me tell you that's not so common. It's rare to have them; and if you chance to have them it's rare not to be ashamed of them. I go after them—when I judge they won't hurt any one."

"You're lucky to have money for your travelling-expenses," said Nick.

"No doubt, no doubt; but I do it very cheap. I take my stand on my nature, on my disposition. I'm not ashamed of it, I don't think it's so horrible, my disposition. But we've befogged and befouled so the whole question of liberty, of spontaneity, of good-humour and inclination and enjoyment, that there's nothing that makes people stare so as to see one natural."

"You are always thinking too much of 'people.'"

"They say I think too little," Gabriel smiled.

"Well, I've agreed to stand for Harsh," said Nick, with a roundabout transition.

"It's you then who are lucky to have money."

"I haven't," Nick replied. "My expenses are to be paid."

"Then you too must think of 'people.'"

Nick made no answer to this, but after a moment he said: "I wish very much you had more to show for it."

"To show for what?"

"Your little system—the æsthetic life."

Nash hesitated, tolerantly, gaily, as he often did, with an

air of being embarrassed to choose between several answers, any one of them would be so right. "Oh, having something to show is such a poor business. It's a kind of confession of failure."

"Yes, you're more affected than anything else," said Nick, impatiently.

"No, my dear boy, I'm more good-natured: don't I prove it? I'm rather disappointed to find that you are not worthy of the esoteric doctrine. But there is, I confess, another plane of intelligence, honourable, and very honourable in its way, from which *may* legitimately appear important to have something to show. If you *must* confine yourself to that plane I won't refuse you my sympathy. After all, that's what *I* have to show! But the degree of my sympathy must of course depend on the nature of the manifestation that you wish to make."

"You know it very well—you've guessed it," Nick rejoined, looking before him in a conscious, modest way which, if he had been a few years younger, would have been called sheepish.

"Ah, you've broken the scent with telling me you are going to return to the House of Commons," said Nash.

"No wonder you don't make it out! My situation is certainly absurd enough. What I really want to do is to be a painter. That's the abject, crude, ridiculous fact. In this out-of-the-way corner, at the dead of night, in lowered tones, I venture to disclose it to you. Isn't that the æsthetic life?"

"Do you know how to paint?" asked Nash.

"Not in the least. No element of burlesque is therefore wanting to my position."

"That makes no difference. I'm so glad!"



"So glad I don't know how?"

"So glad of it all. Yes, that only makes it better. You're a delightful case, and I like delightful cases. We must see it through. I rejoice that I met you."

"Do you think I can do anything?" Nick inquired.

"Paint good pictures? How can I tell till I've seen some of your work? Doesn't it come back to me that at Oxford you used to sketch very prettily? But that's the last thing that matters."

"What does matter, then?" Nick demanded, turning his eyes on his companion.

"To be on the right side—on the side of beauty."

"There will be precious little beauty if I produce nothing but daubs."

"Ah, you cling to the old false measure of success. I must cure you of that. There will be the beauty of having been disinterested and independent; of having taken the world in the free, brave, personal way."

"I shall nevertheless paint decently if I can," Nick declared.

"I'm almost sorry! It will make your case less clear, your example less grand."

"My example will be grand enough, with the fight I shall have to make."

"The fight—with whom?"

"With myself, first of all. I'm awfully against it."

"Ah, but you'll have me on the other side," smiled Nash.

"Well, you'll have more than a handful to meet—everything, every one that belongs to me, that touches me, near or far: my family, my blood, my heredity, my traditions, my

promises, my circumstances, my prejudices; my little past, such as it is; my great future, such as it has been supposed it may be."

"I see, I see; it's admirable!" Nash exclaimed. "And Mrs. Dallow into the bargain," he added.

"Yes, Mrs. Dallow, if you like."

"Are you in love with her?"

"Not in the least."

"Well, she is with you—so I perceived."

"Don't say that," said Nick Dormer, with sudden sternness.

"Ah, you are, you are!" his companion rejoined, judging apparently from this accent.

"I don't know what I am—heaven help me!" Nick broke out, tossing his hat down on his little tin table with vehemence. "I'm a freak of nature and a sport of the mocking gods! Why should they go out of their way to worry me? Why should they do anything so inconsequent, so improbable, so preposterous? It's the vulgarest practical joke. There has never been anything of the sort among us; we are all Philistines to the core, with about as much æsthetic sense as that hat. It's excellent soil—I don't complain of it—but not a soil to grow that flower. From where the devil, then, has the seed been dropped? I look back from generation to generation; I scour our annals without finding the least little sketching grandmother, any sign of a building, or versifying, or collecting, or even tulip-raising ancestor. They were all as blind as bats and none the less happy for that. I'm a wanton variation, an unaccountable monster. My dear father, rest his soul, went through life without a suspicion that there is anything in it

that can't be boiled into blue-books ; and he became, in that conviction, a very distinguished person. He brought me up in the same simplicity and in the hope of the same eminence. It would have been better if I had remained so. I think it's partly your fault that I haven't," Nick went on. "At Oxford you were very bad company for me, my evil genius ; you opened my eyes, you communicated the poison. Since then, little by little, it has been working within me ; vaguely, covertly, insensibly at first, but during the last year or two with violence, pertinacity, cruelty. I have taken every antidote in life ; but it's no use—I'm stricken. It tears me to pieces, as I may say."

"I see, I follow you," said Nash, who had listened to this recital with radiant interest and curiosity. "And that's why you are going to stand."

"Precisely—it's an antidote. And, at present, you're another."

"Another?"

"That's why I jumped at you. A bigger dose of you may disagree with me to that extent that I shall either die or get better."

"I shall control the dilution," said Nash. "Poor fellow—if you're elected!" he added.

"Poor fellow either way. You don't know the atmosphere in which I live, the horror, the scandal that my apostasy would inspire, the injury and suffering that it would inflict. I believe it would kill my mother. She thinks my father is watching me from the skies."

"Jolly to make him jump!" Nash exclaimed.

"He would jump indeed ; he would come straight down on top of me. And then the grotesqueness of it—to *begin*, all of a sudden, at my age."

"It's perfect indeed ; it's a magnificent case," Nash went on.

"Think how it sounds—a paragraph in the London papers : 'Mr. Nicholas Dormer, M.P. for Harsh and son of the late Right Honourable, and so forth and so forth, is about to give up his seat and withdraw from public life in order to devote himself to the practice of portrait-painting. Orders respectfully solicited.' "

"The nineteenth century is better than I thought," said Nash. "It's the portrait that preoccupies you ?"

"I wish you could see ; you must come immediately to my place in London."

"You wretch, you're capable of having talent !" cried Nash.

"No, I'm too old, too old. It's too late to go through the mill."

"You make *me* young ! Don't miss your election, at your peril. Think of the edification."

"The edification ?"

"Of your throwing it all up the next moment."

"That would be pleasant for Mr. Carteret," Nick observed.

"Mr. Carteret ?"

"A dear old fellow who will wish to pay my agent's bill."

"Serve him right, for such depraved tastes."

"You do me good," said Nick, getting up and turning away.

“Don’t call me useless then.”

“Ah, but not in the way you mean. It’s only if I don’t get in that I shall perhaps console myself with the brush,” Nick continued, as they retraced their steps.

“In the name of all the muses, then, don’t stand. For you *will* get in.”

“Very likely. At any rate I’ve promised.”

“You’ve promised Mrs. Dallow?”

“It’s her place ; she’ll put me in,” Nick said.

“Baleful woman ! But I’ll pull you out !”



## X.

FOR several days Peter Sherringham had business in hand which left him neither time nor freedom of mind to occupy himself actively with the ladies of the Hôtel de la Garonne. There were moments when they brushed across his memory, but their passage was rapid and not lighted up with any particular complacency of attention ; for he shrank considerably from bringing it to the proof—the question of whether Miriam would be an interest or only a bore. She had left him, after their second meeting, with a quickened expectation, but in the course of a few hours that flame had burned dim. Like many other men Sherringham was a mixture of impulse and reflection ; but he was peculiar in this, that thinking things over almost always made him think less well of them. He found illusions necessary, so that in order to keep an adequate number going he often earnestly forbade himself that exercise. Mrs. Rooth and her daughter were there and could certainly be trusted to make themselves felt. He was conscious of their anxiety, their calculations, as of a kind of oppression ; he knew that, whatever results might ensue, he should have to do something positive for them. An idea of tenacity, of worrying feminine duration, associated itself with their presence ; he would have assented with a silent nod to the proposition (enunciated by Gabriel Nash) that he was saddled with them.

Remedies hovered before him, but they figured also at the same time as complications; ranging vaguely from the expenditure of money to the discovery that he was in love. This latter accident would be particularly tedious; he had a full perception of the arts by which the girl's mother might succeed in making it so. It would not be a compensation for trouble, but a trouble which in itself would require compensation. Would that balm spring from the spectacle of the young lady's genius? The genius would have to be very great to justify a rising young diplomatist in making a fool of himself.

With the excuse of pressing work he put off his young pupil from day to day, and from day to day he expected to hear her knock at his door. It would be time enough when they came after him; and he was unable to see how, after all, he could serve them even then. He had proposed impetuously a course of theatres; but that would be a considerable personal effort, now that the summer was about to begin, with bad air, stale pieces, tired actors. When, however, more than a week had elapsed without a reminder of his neglected promise, it came over him that he must himself in honour give a sign. There was a delicacy in such discretion—he was touched by being let alone. The flurry of work at the Embassy was over, and he had time to ask himself what, in especial, he should do. He wished to have something definite to suggest before communicating with the Hôtel de la Garonne.

As a consequence of this speculation he went back to Madame Carré, to ask her to reconsider her unfavourable judgment and give the young English lady—to oblige him—a dozen lessons of the sort that she knew how to give. He was

aware that this request scarcely stood on its feet ; for in the first place Madame Carré never reconsidered, when once she had got her impression, and in the second she never wasted herself on subjects whom nature had not formed to do her honour. He knew that his asking her to strain a point to please him would give her a false idea (for that matter, she had it already) of his relations, actual or prospective, with the girl ; but he reflected that he needn't care for that, as Miriam herself probably wouldn't care. What he had mainly in mind was to say to the old actress that she had been mistaken—the *jeune Anglaise* was not such a duffer. This would take some courage, but it would also add to the amusement of his visit.

He found her at home, but as soon as he had expressed the conviction I have mentioned she exclaimed : “ Oh, your *jeune Anglaise*, I know a great deal more about her than you ! She has been back to see me twice ; she doesn't go the longest way round. She charges me like a grenadier, and she asks me to give her—guess a little what !—private recitations, all to herself. If she doesn't succeed it won't be for want of knowing how to thump at doors. The other day, when I came in, she was waiting for me ; she had been there for an hour. My private recitations—have you an idea what people pay for them ? ”

“ Between artists, you know, there are easier conditions,” Sherringham laughed.

“ How do I know if she's an artist ? She won't open her mouth to me ; what she wants is to make me say things to her. She does make me—I don't know how—and she sits

there gaping at me with her big eyes. They look like open pockets !”

“I dare say she'll profit by it,” said Sherringham.

“I dare say *you* will ! Her face is stupid while she watches me, and when she has tired me out she simply walks away. However, as she comes back—” Madame Carré paused a moment, listened, and then exclaimed : “Didn't I tell you ?”

Sherringham heard a parley of voices in the little ante-chamber, and the next moment the door was pushed open and Miriam Rooth bounded into the room. She was flushed and breathless, without a smile, very direct.

“Will you hear me to-day ? I know four things,” she immediately began. Then, perceiving Sherringham, she added in the same brisk, earnest tone, as if the matter were of the highest importance : “Oh, how d'y'e do ? I'm very glad you are here.” She said nothing else to him than this, appealed to him in no way, made no allusion to his having neglected her, but addressed herself entirely to Madame Carré, as if he had not been there ; making no excuses and using no flattery ; taking rather a tone of equal authority, as if she considered that the celebrated artist had a sacred duty toward her. This was another variation, Sherringham thought ; it differed from each of the attitudes in which he had previously seen her. It came over him suddenly that so far from there being any question of her having the histrionic nature, she simply had it in such perfection that she was always acting ; that her existence was a series of parts assumed for the moment, each changed for the next, before the perpetual mirror of some curiosity or admiration or wonder—some spectatorship that she

perceived or imagined in the people about her. Interested as he had ever been in the profession of which she was potentially an ornament, this idea startled him by its novelty and even lent, on the spot, a formidable, a really appalling character to Miriam Rooth. It struck him abruptly that a woman whose only being was to "make believe," to make believe that she had any and every being that you liked, that would serve a purpose, produce a certain effect, and whose identity resided in the continuity of her personations, so that she had no moral privacy, as he phrased it to himself, but lived in a high wind of exhibition, of figuration—such a woman was a kind of monster, in whom of necessity there would be nothing to like, because there would be nothing to take hold of. He felt for a moment that he had been very simple not before to have achieved that analysis of the actress. The girl's very face made it vivid to him now—the discovery that she positively had no countenance of her own, but only the countenance of the occasion, a sequence, a variety (capable possibly of becoming immense), of representative movements. She was always trying them, practising them for her amusement or profit, jumping from one to the other and extending her range; and this would doubtless be her occupation more and more as she acquired ease and confidence. The expression that came nearest to belonging to her, as it were, was the one that came nearest to being a blank—an air of inanity when she forgot herself, watching something. Then her eye was heavy and her mouth rather common; though it was perhaps just at such a moment that the fine line of her head told most. She had looked slightly *bête* even when Sherringham, on their



first meeting at Madame Carré's, said to Nick Dormer that she was the image of the Tragic Muse.

Now, at any rate, he had the apprehension that she might do what she liked with her face. It was an elastic substance, an element of gutta-percha, like the flexibility of the gymnast, the lady who, at a music-hall, is shot from the mouth of a cannon. He coloured a little at this quickened view of the actress; he had always looked more poetically, somehow, at that priestess of art. But what was she, the priestess, when one came to think of it, but a female gymnast, a mountebank at higher wages? She didn't literally hang by her heels from a trapeze, holding a fat man in her teeth, but she made the same use of her tongue, of her eyes, of the imitative trick, that her muscular sister made of leg and jaw. It was an odd circumstance that Miriam Rooth's face seemed to him to-day a finer instrument than old Madame Carré's. It was doubtless that the girl's was fresh and strong, with a future in it, while poor Madame Carré's was worn and weary, with only a past.

The old woman said something, half in jest, half in real resentment, about the brutality of youth, as Miriam went to a mirror and quickly took off her hat, patting and arranging her hair as a preliminary to making herself heard. Sherringham saw with surprise and amusement that the clever Frenchwoman, who had in her long life exhausted every adroitness, was in a manner helpless, condemned, both protesting and consenting. Miriam had taken but a few days and a couple of visits to become a successful force; she had imposed herself, and Madame Carré, while she laughed (yet looked terrible too, with artifices of eye and gesture), was reduced to the last

line of defence—that of declaring her coarse and clumsy, saying she might knock her down, but that proved nothing. She spoke jestingly enough not to offend Miriam, but her manner betrayed the irritation of an intelligent woman who, at an advanced age, found herself for the first time failing to understand. What she didn't understand was the kind of social product that had been presented to her by Gabriel Nash; and this suggested to Sherringham that the *jeune Anglaise* was perhaps indeed rare, a new type, as Madame Carré must have seen innumerable varieties. He guessed that the girl was perfectly prepared to be abused and that her indifference to what might be thought of her discretion was a proof of life, health and spirit, the insolence of conscious power.

When she had given herself a touch at the glass she turned round, with a rapid "*Ecoutez maintenant !*" and stood leaning a moment, slightly lowered and inclined backward, with her hands behind her and supporting her, on the table in front of the mirror. She waited an instant, turning her eyes from one of her companions to the other as if she were taking possession of them (an eminently conscious, intentional proceeding, which made Sherringham ask himself what had become of her former terror and whether that and her tears had all been a comedy): after which, abruptly straightening herself, she began to repeat a short French poem, a composition modern and delicate, one of the things she had induced Madame Carré to say over to her. She had learned it, practised it, rehearsed it to her mother, and now she had been childishly eager to show what she could do with it. What she mainly did was to reproduce with a crude fidelity, but with extraordinary memory,

the intonations, the personal quavers and cadences of her model.

“How bad you make me seem to myself, and if I were you how much better I should say it!” was Madame Carré’s first criticism.

Miriam allowed her little time to develop this idea, for she broke out, at the shortest intervals, with the five other specimens of verse to which the old actress had handed her the key. They were all delicate lyrics, of tender or pathetic intention, by contemporary poets—all things demanding perfect taste and art, a mastery of tone, of insinuation, in the interpreter. Miriam had gobbled them up, and she gave them forth in the same way as the first, with close, rude, audacious mimicry. There was a moment when Sherringham was afraid Madame Carré would think she was making fun of her manner, her celebrated simpers and grimaces, so extravagant did the girl’s performance cause these refinements to appear.

When she had finished, the old woman said: “Should you like now to hear how *you* do it?” and, without waiting for an answer, phrased and trilled the last of the pieces, from beginning to end, exactly as Miriam had done, making this imitation of an imitation the drollest thing conceivable. If she had been annoyed it was a perfect revenge. Miriam had dropped on a sofa, exhausted, and she stared at first, looking flushed and wild; then she gave way to merriment, laughing with a high sense of comedy. She said afterwards, to defend herself, that the verses in question, and indeed all those she had recited, were of the most difficult sort: you had to do them; they didn’t do themselves—they were things in which the *gros*

*moyens* were of no avail. "Ah, my poor child, your means are all *gros moyens* ; you appear to have no others," Madame Carré replied. "You do what you can, but there are people like that ; it's the way they are made. They can never come nearer to the delicate ; shades don't exist for them, they don't see certain differences. It was to show you a difference that I repeated that thing as you repeat it, as you represent my doing it. If you are struck with the little the two ways have in common, so much the better. But you seem to me to coarsen everything you touch."

Sherringham thought this judgment harsh to cruelty, and perceived that Miss Rooth had the power to set the teeth of her instructress on edge. She acted on her nerves ; she was made of a thick, rough substance which the old woman was not accustomed to manipulate. This exasperation, however, was a kind of flattery ; it was neither indifference nor simple contempt ; it acknowledged a mystifying reality in the girl and even a degree of importance. Miriam remarked, serenely enough, that the things she wanted most to do were just those that were not for the *gros moyens*, the vulgar obvious dodges, the starts and shouts that any one could think of and that the *gros public* liked. She wanted to do what was most difficult and to plunge into it from the first ; and she explained, as if it were a discovery of her own, that there were two kinds of scenes and speeches : those which acted themselves, of which the treatment was plain, the only way, so that you had just to take it ; and those which were open to interpretation, with which you had to fight every step, rendering, arranging, doing it according to your idea. Some of the most effective things, and the most

celebrated and admired, like the frenzy of Juliet with her potion, were of the former sort ; but it was the others she liked best.

Madame Carré received this revelation good-naturedly enough, considering its want of freshness, and only laughed at the young lady for looking so nobly patronizing while she gave it. It was clear that her laughter was partly dedicated to the good faith with which Miriam described herself as preponderantly interested in the subtler problems of her art. Sherringham was charmed with the girl's pluck—if it was pluck and not mere density—the brightness with which she submitted, for a purpose, to the old woman's rough usage. He wanted to take her away, to give her a friendly caution, to advise her not to become a bore, not to expose herself. But she held up her beautiful head in a way that showed she didn't care at present how she exposed herself, and that (it was half coarseness—Madame Carré was so far right—and half fortitude) she had no intention of coming away so long as there was anything to be picked up. She sat, and still she sat, challenging her hostess with every sort of question—some reasonable, some ingenious, some strangely futile and some highly indiscreet ; but all with the effect that, contrary to Sherringham's expectation, Madame Carré warmed to the work of answering and explaining, became interested, was content to keep her and to talk. Yet she took her ease ; she relieved herself, with the rare cynicism of the artist, all the crudity, the irony and intensity of a discussion of esoteric things, of personal mysteries, of methods and secrets. It was the oddest hour Sherringham had ever spent, even in the course of investigation which had often led him into the *cuisine*, as the French called



it, the distillery or back-shop of the admired profession. He got up several times to come away ; then he remained, partly in order not to leave Miriam alone with her terrible initiatress, partly because he was both amused and edified, and partly because Madame Carré held him by the appeal of her sharp, confidential old eyes, addressing her talk to him, with Miriam as a subject, a vile illustration. She undressed this young lady, as it were, from head to foot, turned her inside out, weighed and measured and sounded her : it was all, for Sherringham, a new revelation of the point to which, in her profession and nation, a ferocious analysis had been carried, with an intelligence of the business and a special vocabulary. What struck him above all was the way she knew her reasons and everything was sharp and clear in her mind and lay under her hand. If she had rare perceptions she had traced them to their source ; she could give an account of what she did ; she knew perfectly why ; she could explain it, defend it, amplify it, fight for it : and all this was an intellectual joy to her, allowing her a chance to abound and insist and be clever. There was a kind of cruelty, or at least of hardness in it all, to Sherringham's English sense, that sense which can never really reconcile itself to the question of execution and has extraneous sentiments to placate with compromises and superficialities, frivolities that have often a pleasant moral fragrance. In theory there was nothing that he valued more than just such a logical passion as Madame Carré's ; but in fact, when he found himself in close quarters with it, it was apt to seem to him an ado about nothing.

If the old woman was hard, it was not that many of her

present conclusions, as regards Miriam, were not indulgent, but that she had a vision of the great manner, of right and wrong, of the just and the false, so high and religious that the individual was nothing before it—a prompt and easy sacrifice. It made Sherringham uncomfortable, as he had been made uncomfortable by certain *feuilletons*, reviews of the theatres in the Paris newspapers, which he was committed to thinking important, but of which, when they were very good, he was rather ashamed. When they were very good, that is when they were very thorough, they were very personal, as was inevitable in dealing with the most personal of the arts: they went into details; they put the dots on the *i*'s; they discussed impartially the qualities of appearance, the physical gifts of the actor or actress, finding them in some cases reprehensibly inadequate. Sherringham could not rid himself of a prejudice against these pronouncements; in the case of the actresses especially they appeared to him brutal and indelicate—unmanly as coming from a critic sitting smoking in his chair. At the same time he was aware of the dilemma (he hated it; it made him blush still more) in which his objection lodged him. If one was right in liking the actor's art one ought to have been interested in every candid criticism of it, which, given the peculiar conditions, would be legitimate in proportion as it should be minute. If the criticism that recognized frankly these conditions seemed an inferior or an offensive thing, then what was to be said for the art itself? What an implication, if the criticism was tolerable only so long as it was worthless—so long as it remained vague and timid! This was a knot which Sherring-

ham had never straightened out: he contented himself with saying that there was no reason a theatrical critic shouldn't be a gentleman, at the same time that he often remarked that it was an odious trade, which no gentleman could possibly follow. The best of the fraternity, so conspicuous in Paris, were those who didn't follow it—those who, while pretending to write about the stage, wrote about everything else.

It was as if Madame Carré, in pursuance of her inflamed sense that the art was everything and the individual nothing, save as he happened to serve it, had said: "Well, if she *will* have it she shall; she shall know what she is in for, what I went through, battered and broken in as we all have been—all who are worthy, who have had the honour. She shall know the real point of view." It was as if she were still haunted with Mrs. Rooth's nonsense, her hypocrisy, her scruples—something she felt a need to belabour, to trample on. Miriam took it all as a bath, a baptism, with passive exhilaration and gleeful shivers; staring, wondering, sometimes blushing and failing to follow, but not shrinking nor wounded; laughing, when it was necessary, at her own expense, and feeling evidently that this at last was the air of the profession, an initiation which nothing could undo. Sherringham said to her that he would see her home—that he wanted to talk to her and she must walk away with him. "And it's understood, then, she may come back," he added to Madame Carré. "It's my affair, of course. You'll take an interest in her for a month or two; she will sit at your feet."

"Oh, I'll knock her about; she seems stout enough!" said the old actress.

## XI.

WHEN she had descended into the street with Sherringham Miriam informed him that she was thirsty, dying to drink something: upon which he asked her if she would have any objection to going with him to a café.

“Objection? I have spent my life in cafés!” she exclaimed. “They are warm in winter and they are full of gaslight. Mamma and I have sat in them for hours, many a time, with a *consommation* of three sous, to save fire and candles at home. We have lived in places we couldn’t sit in, if you want to know—where there was only really room if we were in bed. Mamma’s money is sent out from England, and sometimes it didn’t come. Once it didn’t come for months—for months and months. I don’t know how we lived. There wasn’t any to come; there wasn’t any to get home. That isn’t amusing when you’re away, in a foreign town, without any friends. Mamma used to borrow, but people wouldn’t always lend. You needn’t be afraid—she won’t borrow from you. We are rather better now. Something has been done in England; I don’t understand what. It’s only fivepence a year, but it has been settled; it comes regularly; it used to come only when we had written and begged and waited. But it made no difference; mamma was always up to her ears in books. They served her for food and drink. When she had nothing to eat she began

a novel in ten volumes—the old-fashioned ones; they lasted longest. She knows every *cabinet de lecture* in every town; the little cheap, shabby ones, I mean, in the back streets, where they have odd volumes and only ask a sou, and the books are so old that they smell bad. She takes them to the cafés—the little cheap, shabby cafés, too—and she reads there all the evening. That's very well for her, but it doesn't feed me. I don't like a diet of dirty old novels. I sit there beside her, with nothing to do, not even a stocking to mend; she doesn't think that's *comme il faut*. I don't know what the people take me for. However, we have never been spoken to: any one can see mamma's a lady. As for me, I dare say I might be anything. If you're going to be an actress you must get used to being looked at. There were people in England who used to ask us to stay; some of them were our cousins—or mamma says they were. I have never been very clear about our cousins, and I don't think they were at all clear about us. Some of them are dead; the others don't ask us any more. You should hear mamma on the subject of our visits in England. It's very convenient when your cousins are dead, because that explains everything. Mamma has delightful phrases: 'My family is almost extinct.' Then your family may have been anything you like. Ours, of course, was magnificent. We did stay in a place once where there was a deer-park, and also private theatricals. I played in them; I was only fifteen years old, but I was very big and I thought I was in heaven. I will go anywhere you like; you needn't be afraid; we have been in places! I have learned a great deal that way; sitting beside mamma and watching



people, their faces, their types, their movements. There's a great deal goes on in cafés: people come to them to talk things over, their private affairs, their complications; they have important meetings. Oh, I've observed scenes, between men and women—very quiet, terribly quiet, but tragic! Once I saw a woman do something that I'm going to do some day, when I'm great—if I can get the situation. I'll tell you what it is some day; I'll do it for you. Oh, it *is* the book of life!"

So Miriam discoursed, familiarly, disconnectedly, as the pair went their way down the Rue de Constantinople; and she continued to abound in anecdote and remark after they were seated face to face at a little marble table in an establishment which Sherringham selected carefully and he had caused her, at her request, to be accommodated with *sirop d'orgeat*. "I know what it will come to: Madame Carré will want to keep me." This was one of the announcements she presently made.

"To keep you?"

"For the French stage. She won't want to let you have me." She said things of that kind, astounding in self-complacency, the assumption of quick success. She was in earnest, evidently prepared to work, but her imagination flew over preliminaries and probations, took no account of the steps in the process, especially the first tiresome ones, the test of patience. Sherringham had done nothing for her as yet, given no substantial pledge of interest; yet she was already talking as if his protection were assured and jealous. Certainly, however, she seemed to belong to him very much indeed, as she sat facing him in the Paris café, in her youth, her beauty and her talkative confidence. This degree of possession was highly

agreeable to him, and he asked nothing more than to make it last and go further. The impulse to draw her out was irresistible, to encourage her to show herself to the end; for if he was really destined to take her career in hand he counted on some pleasant equivalent—such, for instance, as that she should at least amuse him.

“It’s very singular; I know nothing like it,” he said—  
“your equal mastery of two languages.”

“Say of half a dozen,” Miriam smiled.

“Oh, I don’t believe in the others to the same degree. I don’t imagine that, with all deference to your undeniable facility, you would be judged fit to address a German or an Italian audience in their own tongue. But you might a French, perfectly, and they are the most particular of all; for their idiom is supersensitive and they are incapable of enduring the *baragouinage* of foreigners, to which we listen with such complacency. In fact, your French is better than your English—it’s more conventional; there are little queernesses and impurities in your English, as if you had lived abroad too much. Ah, you must work that.”

“I’ll work it with you. I like the way you speak.”

“You must speak beautifully; you must do something for the standard.”

“For the standard?”

“There isn’t any, after all; it has gone to the dogs.”

“Oh, I’ll bring it back. I know what you mean.”

“No one knows, no one cares; the sense is gone—it isn’t in the public,” Sherringham continued, ventilating a grievance he was rarely able to forget, the vision of which now suddenly

made a mission full of sanctity for Miriam Rooth. "Purity of speech, on our stage, doesn't exist. Every one speaks as he likes, and audiences never notice; it's the last thing they think of. The place is given up to abominable dialects and individual tricks, any vulgarity flourishes, and on the top of it all the Americans, with every conceivable crudity, come in to make confusion worse confounded. And when one laments it people stare; they don't know what one means."

"Do you mean the grand manner, certain pompous pronunciations, the style of the Kembles?"

"I mean any style that *is* a style, that is a system, an art, that contributes a positive beauty to utterance. When I pay ten shillings to hear you speak, I want you to know how, *que diable!* Say that to people and they are mostly lost in stupor; only a few, the very intelligent ones, exclaim: 'Then do you want actors to be affected?'"

"And *do* you?" asked Miriam, full of interest.

"My poor child, what else, under the sun, should they be? Isn't their whole art the affectation *par excellence*? The public won't stand that to-day, so one hears it said. If that be true, it simply means that the theatre, as I care for it, that is as a personal art, is at an end."

"Never, never, never!" the girl cried, in a voice that made a dozen people look round.

"I sometimes think it—that the personal art *is* at an end, and that henceforth we shall have only the arts—capable, no doubt, of immense development in their way (indeed they have already reached it)—of the stage-carpenter and the costumer. In London the drama is already smothered in scenery; the

interpretation scrambles off as it can. To get the old personal impression, which used to be everything, you must go to the poor countries, and most of all to Italy."

"Oh, I've had it; it's very personal!" said Miriam, knowingly.

"You've seen the nudity of the stage, the poor painted, tattered screen behind, and in the empty space the histrionic figure, doing everything it knows how, in complete possession. The personality isn't our English personality, and it may not always carry us with it; but the direction is right, and it has the superiority that it's a human exhibition, not a mechanical one."

"I can act just like an Italian," said Miriam, eagerly.

"I would rather you acted like an Englishwoman, if an Englishwoman would only act."

"Oh, I'll show you!"

"But you're not English," said Sherringham, sociably, with his arms on the table.

"I beg your pardon; you should hear mamma about our 'race.'"

"You're a Jewess—I'm sure of that," Sherringham went on.

She jumped at this, as he was destined to see, later, that she would jump at anything that would make her more interesting or striking; even at things which, grotesquely, contradicted or excluded each other. "That's always possible, if one's clever. I'm very willing, because I want to be the English Rachel."

"Then you must leave Madame Carré, as soon as you have got from her what she can give."

"Oh, you needn't fear; you sha'n't lose me," the girl replied, with gross, charming fatuity. "My name is Jewish," she went on, "but it was that of my grandmother, my father's

mother. She was a baroness, in Germany. That is she was the daughter of a baron."

Sherringham accepted this statement with reservations, but he replied: "Put all that together, and it makes you very sufficiently of Rachel's tribe."

"I don't care, if I'm of her tribe artistically. I'm of the family of the artists; *je me fiche* of any other! I'm in the same style as that woman; I know it."

"You speak as if you had seen her," said Sherringham, amused at the way she talked of "that woman."

"Oh, I know all about her; I know all about all the great actors. But that won't prevent me from speaking divine English."

"You must learn lots of verse; you must repeat it to me," Sherringham went on. "You must break yourself in till you can say anything. You must learn passages of Milton, passages of Wordsworth."

"Did *they* write plays?"

"Oh, it isn't only a matter of plays! You can't speak a part properly till you can speak everything else, anything that comes up, especially in proportion as it's difficult. That gives you authority."

"Oh, yes, I'm going in for authority. There's more chance in English," the girl added, in the next breath. "There are not so many others—the terrible competition. There are so many here—not that I'm afraid," she chattered on. "But we've got America, and they haven't. America's a great place."

"You talk like a theatrical agent. They're lucky not to have it as we have it. Some of them do go, and it ruins them."



"Why, it fills their pockets!" Miriam cried.

"Yes, but see what they pay. It's the death of an actor to play to big populations that don't understand his language. It's nothing then but the *gros moyens*; all his delicacy perishes. However, they'll understand *you*."

"Perhaps I shall be too affected," said Miriam.

"You won't be more so than Garrick or Mrs. Siddons or John Kemble or Edmund Kean. They understood Edmund Kean. All reflection is affectation, and all acting is reflection."

"I don't know; mine is instinct," Miriam replied.

"My dear young lady, you talk of 'yours'; but don't be offended if I tell you that yours doesn't exist. Some day it will, if it comes off. Madame Carré's does, because she has reflected. The talent, the desire, the energy are an instinct; but by the time these things become a performance they are an instinct put in its place."

"Madame Carré is very philosophic. I shall never be like her."

"Of course you won't; you'll be original. But you'll have your own ideas."

"I dare say I shall have a good many of yours," said Miriam, smiling across the table.

They sat a moment looking at each other.

"Don't go in for coquetry; it's a waste of time."

"Well, that's civil!" the girl cried.

"Oh, I don't mean for me; I mean for yourself. I want you to be so concentrated. I am bound to give you good advice. You don't strike me as flirtatious and that sort of thing, and that's in your favour."

"In my favour!"

"It does save time."

"Perhaps it saves too much. Don't you think the artist ought to have passions?"

Sherringham hesitated a moment: he thought an examination of this question premature. "Flirtations are not passions," he replied. "No, you are simple—at least I suspect you are; for of course, with a woman, one would be clever to know." She asked why he pronounced her simple, but he judged it best, and more consonant with fair play, to defer even a treatment of this branch of the question; so that, to change the subject, he said: "Be sure you don't betray me to your friend Mr Nash."

"Betray you? Do you mean about your recommending affectation?"

"Dear me, no; he recommends it himself. That is he practises it, and on a scale!"

"But he makes one hate it."

"He proves what I mean," said Sherringham: "that the great comedian is the one who raises it to a science. If we paid ten shillings to listen to Mr. Nash, we should think him very fine. But we want to know what it's supposed to be."

"It's too odious, the way he talks about *us*!" Miriam cried, assentingly.

"About 'us'?"

"Us poor actors."

"It's the competition he dislikes," said Sherringham, laughing.

"However, he is very good-natured; he lent mamma thirty

pounds," the girl added, honestly. Sherringham, at this information, was not able to repress a certain small twinge which his companion perceived and of which she appeared to mistake the meaning. "Of course he'll get it back," she went on, while Sherringham looked at her in silence for a minute. Fortune had not supplied him profusely with money, but his emotion was not caused by the apprehension that he too would probably have to put his hand in his pocket for Mrs. Rooth. It was simply the instinctive recoil of a fastidious nature from the idea of familiar intimacy with people who lived from hand to mouth, and a sense that that intimacy would have to be defined if it was to go much further. He would wish to know what it was supposed to be, like Gabriel Nash's histrionics. After a moment Miriam mistook his thought still more completely, and in doing so gave him a flash of foreknowledge of the way it was in her to strike from time to time a note exasperatingly, almost consciously vulgar, which one would hate for the reason, among others, that by that time one would be in love with her. "Well, then, he won't—if you don't believe it!" she exclaimed, with a laugh. He was saying to himself that the only possible form was that they should borrow only from him. "You're a funny man: I make you blush," Miriam persisted.

"I must reply with the *tu quoque*, though I have not that effect on you."

"I don't understand," said the girl.

"You're an extraordinary young lady."

"You mean I'm horrid. Well, I dare say I am. But I'm better when you know me."

Sherringham made no direct rejoinder to this, but after a moment he said : " Your mother must repay that money. I'll give it to her."

" You had better give it to him ! " cried Miriam. " If once *we* have it—" She interrupted herself, and with another and a softer tone, one of her professional transitions, she remarked, " I suppose you have never known any one that's poor."

" I'm poor myself. That is I'm very far from rich. But why receive favours—?" And here he, in turn, checked himself, with the sense that he was indeed taking a great deal on his back if he pretended already (he had not seen the pair three times) to regulate their intercourse with the rest of the world. But Miriam instantly carried out his thought and more than his thought.

" Favours from Mr. Nash? Oh, he doesn't count ! "

The way she dropped these words (they would have been admirable on the stage) made him laugh and say immediately : " What I meant just now was that you are not to tell him, after all my swagger, that I consider that you and I are really required to save our theatre."

" Oh, if we can save it, he shall know it ! " Then Miriam added that she must positively get home ; her mother would be in a state : she had really scarcely ever been out alone. He mightn't think it, but so it was. Her mother's ideas, those awfully proper ones, were not all talk. She *did* keep her ! Sherringham accepted this—he had an adequate, and indeed an analytic vision of Mrs. Rooth's conservatism ; but he observed at the same time that his companion made no motion to rise. He made none, either ; he only said—

"We are very frivolous, the way we chatter. What you want to do, to get your foot in the stirrup, is supremely difficult. There is everything to overcome. You have neither an engagement nor the prospect of an engagement."

"Oh, you'll get me one!" Miriam's manner expressed that this was so certain that it was not worth dilating upon; so instead of dilating she inquired abruptly, a second time: "Why do you think I'm so simple?"

"I don't then. Didn't I tell you just now that you were extraordinary? That's the term moreover that you applied to yourself when you came to see me—when you said a girl had to be, to wish to go on the stage. It remains the right one, and your simplicity doesn't mitigate it. What's rare in you is that you have—as I suspect, at least—no nature of your own." Miriam listened to this as if she were preparing to argue with it or not, only as it should strike her as being a pleasing picture; but as yet, naturally, she failed to understand. "You are always playing something; there are no intervals. It's the absence of intervals, of a *fond* or background, that I don't comprehend. You're an embroidery without a canvas."

"Yes, perhaps," the girl replied, with her head on one side, as if she were looking at the pattern. "But I'm very honest."

"You can't be everything, a consummate actress and a flower of the field. You've got to choose."

She looked at him a moment. "I'm glad you think I'm so wonderful."

"Your feigning may be honest, in the sense that your only feeling is your feigned one," Sherringham went on. "That's



what I mean by the absence of a ground or of intervals. It's a kind of thing that's a labyrinth!"

"I know what I am," said Miriam, sententiously.

But her companion continued, following his own train: "Were you really so frightened, the first day you went to Madame Carré's?"

She stared a moment, and then with a flush, throwing back her head: "Do you think I was pretending?"

"I think you always are. However, your vanity (if you had any!) would be natural."

"I have plenty of that—I am not ashamed to own it."

"You would be capable of pretending that you have. But excuse the audacity and the crudity of my speculations—it only proves my interest. What is it that you know you are?"

"Why, an artist. Isn't that a canvas?"

"Yes, an intellectual one, but not a moral."

"Oh yes, it is, too. And I'm a good girl: won't that do?"

"It remains to be seen," Sherringham laughed. "A creature who is *all* an artist—I am curious to see that."

"Surely it has been seen, in lots of painters, lots of musicians."

"Yes, but those arts not personal, like yours. I mean not so much so. There's something left for—what shall I call it?—for character."

Miriam stared again, with her tragic light. "And do you think I've got no character?" As he hesitated she pushed back her chair, rising rapidly.

He looked up at her an instant—she seemed so "plastic"; and then, rising too, he answered: "Delightful being, you've got a hundred!"

## XII.

THE summer arrived and the dense air of the Paris theatres became in fact a still more complicated mixture; yet the occasions were not few on which Peter Sherringham, having placed a box, near the stage (most often a stuffy, dusky *baignoire*), at the disposal of Mrs. Rooth and her daughter, found time to look in, as he said, to spend a part of the evening with them and point the moral of the performance. The pieces, the successes of the winter, had entered the automatic phase: they went on by the force of the impetus acquired, deriving little fresh life from the interpretation, and in ordinary conditions their strong points, as rendered by the actors, would have been as wearisome to Sherringham as an importunate repetition of a good story. But it was not long before he became aware that the conditions could not be regarded as ordinary. There was a new infusion in his consciousness—an element in his life which altered the relations of things. He was not easy till he had found the right name for it—a name the more satisfactory that it was simple, comprehensive and plausible. A new “distraction,” in the French sense, was what he flattered himself he had discovered; he could recognize that as freely as possible without being obliged to classify the agreeable resource as a new entanglement. He was neither too much nor too little diverted; he

had all his usual attention to give to his work : he had only an employment for his odd hours, which, without being imperative, had over various others the advantage of a certain continuity.

And yet, I hasten to add, he was not so well pleased with it but that, among his friends, he maintained for the present a considerable reserve in regard to it. He had no irresistible impulse to tell people that he had disinterred a strange, handsome girl whom he was bringing up for the theatre. She had been seen by several of his associates at his rooms, but she was not soon to be seen there again. Sherringham's reserve might by the ill-natured have been termed dissimulation, inasmuch as when asked by the ladies of the Embassy what had become of the young person who amused them that day so cleverly, he gave it out that her whereabouts was uncertain and her destiny probably obscure ; he let it be supposed in a word that his benevolence had scarcely survived an accidental, charitable occasion. As he went about his customary business, and perhaps even put a little more conscience into the transaction of it, there was nothing to suggest to his companions that he was engaged in a private speculation of a singular kind. It was perhaps his weakness that he carried the apprehension of ridicule too far ; but his excuse may be said to be that he held it unpardonable for a man publicly enrolled in the service of his country to be ridiculous. It was of course not out of all order that such functionaries, their private situation permitting, should enjoy a personal acquaintance with stars of the dramatic, the lyric or even the choregraphic stage : high diplomatists had indeed not rarely

and not invisibly cultivated this privilege without its proving the sepulchre of their reputation. That a gentleman who was not a fool should consent a little to become one for the sake of a celebrated actress or singer—*cela s'était vu*, though it was not perhaps to be recommended. It was not a tendency that was fostered at headquarters, where even the most rising young men were not encouraged to believe they could never fall. Still, it might pass if it were kept in its place ; and there were ancient worthies yet in the profession (not those, however, whom the tradition had helped to go furthest) who held that something of the sort was a graceful ornament of the diplomatic character. Sherringham was aware he was very "rising" ; but Miriam Rooth was not yet a celebrated actress. She was only a youthful artist, in conscientious process of formation, encumbered with a mother still more conscientious than herself. She was a young English lady, very earnest about artistic, about remunerative problems. He had accepted the position of a formative influence, and that was precisely what might provoke derision. He was a ministering angel—his patience and good-nature really entitled him to the epithet, and his rewards would doubtless some day define themselves ; but meanwhile other promotions were in contingent prospect, for the failure of which these would not, even in their abundance, be a compensation. He kept an unembarrassed eye upon Downing Street ; and while it may frankly be said for him that he was neither a pedant nor a prig, he remembered that the last impression he ought to wish to produce there was that of volatility.

He felt not particularly volatile, however, when he sat

behind Miriam at the play and looked over her shoulder at the stage : her observation being so keen and her comments so unexpected in their vivacity that his curiosity was refreshed and his attention stretched beyond its wont. If the spectacle before the footlights had now lost much of its annual brilliancy, the fashion in which Miriam followed it came near being spectacle enough. Moreover, in most cases the attendance of the little party was at the Théâtre Français ; and it has been sufficiently indicated that Sherringham, though the child of a sceptical age and the votary of a cynical science, was still candid enough to take the serious, the religious view of that establishment—the view of M. Sarcey and of the unregenerate provincial mind. “In the trade that I follow we see things too much in the hard light of reason, of calculation,” he once remarked to his young *protégée* ; “but it’s good for the mind to keep up a superstition or two : it leaves a margin, like having a second horse to your brougham for night-work. The arts, the amusements, the æsthetic part of life are night-work, if I may say so without suggesting the nefarious. At any rate you want your second horse—your superstition that stays at home when the sun is high—to go your rounds with. The Théâtre Français is my second horse.”

Miriam’s appetite for this pleasure showed him vividly enough how rarely, in the past, it had been within her reach ; and she pleased him at first by liking everything, seeing almost no differences and taking her deep draught undiluted. She leaned on the edge of the box with bright voracity, tasting to the core yet relishing the surface ; watching each movement of each actor, attending to the way each thing was said or



done as if it were the most important thing, and emitting from time to time applausive or restrictive sounds. It was a very pretty exhibition of enthusiasm, if enthusiasm be ever critical. Sherringham had his wonder about it, as it was a part of the attraction exerted by this young lady that she caused him to have his wonder about everything she did. Was it in fact an exhibition, a line taken for effect, so that at the comedy her own comedy was the most successful of all? That question danced attendance on the liberal intercourse of these young people and fortunately, as yet, did little to embitter Sherringham's share of it. His general sense that she was personating had its especial moments of suspense and perplexity and added variety and even occasionally a degree of excitement to their conversation. At the theatre, for the most part, she was really flushed with eagerness; and with the spectators who turned an admiring eye into the dim compartment of which she pervaded the front, she might have passed for a romantic, or at any rate an insatiable young woman from the country.

Mrs. Rooth took a more placid view, but attended immensely to the story, in respect to which she manifested a patient good faith which had its surprises and its comicalities for Sherringham. She found no play too tedious, no entr'acte too long, no baignoire too hot, no tissue of incidents too complicated, no situation too unnatural and no sentiments too sublime. She gave Sherringham the measure of her power to sit and sit—an accomplishment to which she owed, in the struggle for existence, such superiority as she might be said to have achieved. She could outsit every one, everything else; looking as if she had acquired the practice in repeated years of small frugality

combined with large leisure—periods when she had nothing but time to spend and had learned to calculate, in any situation, how long she could stay. “Staying” was so often a saving—a saving of candles, of fire and even (for it sometimes implied a vision of light refreshment) of food. Sherringham perceived soon enough that she was complete in her way, and if he had been addicted to studying the human mixture in its different combinations he would have found in her an interesting compendium of some of the infatuations that survive a hard discipline. He made indeed without difficulty the reflection that her life might have taught her the reality of things, at the same time that he could scarcely help thinking it clever of her to have so persistently declined the lesson. She appeared to have put it by with a deprecating, ladylike smile—a plea of being too soft and bland for experience.

She took the refined, sentimental, tender view of the universe, beginning with her own history and feelings. She believed in everything high and pure, disinterested and orthodox, and even at the Hôtel de la Garonne was unconscious of the shabby or the ugly side of the world. She never despaired: otherwise what would have been the use of being a Neville-Nugent? Only not to have been one—that would have been discouraging. She delighted in novels, poems, perversions, misrepresentations and evasions, and had a capacity for smooth, superfluous falsification which made Sherringham think her sometimes an amusing and sometimes a tedious inventor. But she was not dangerous even if you believed her; she was not even a warning if you didn't. It was harsh to call her a hypocrite, because you never could have resolved her back into her

character : there was no reverse to her blazonry. She built in the air and was not less amiable than she pretended : only that was a pretence too. She moved altogether in a world of genteel fable and fancy, and Sherringham had to live in it with her, for Miriam's sake, in sociable, vulgar assent, in spite of his feeling that it was rather a low neighbourhood. He was at a loss how to take what she said—she talked sweetly and discursively of so many things—until he simply perceived that he could only take it always for untrue. When Miriam laughed at her he was rather disagreeably affected : “dear mamma's fine stories” was a sufficiently cynical reference to the immemorial infirmity of a parent. But when the girl backed her up, as he phrased it to himself, he liked that even less.

Mrs. Rooth was very fond of a moral and had never lost her taste for edification. She delighted in a beautiful character and was gratified to find so many represented in the contemporary French drama. She never failed to direct Miriam's attention to them and to remind her that there is nothing in life so precious as the ideal. Sherringham noted the difference between the mother and the daughter and thought it singularly marked—the way that one took everything for the sense, or behaved as if she did, caring above all for the subject and the romance, the triumph or defeat of virtue and the moral comfort of it all, and that the other was especially hungry for the manner and the art of it, the presentation and the vividness. Mrs. Rooth abounded in impressive evocations, and yet he saw no link between her facile genius and that of which Miriam gave symptoms. The poor lady never could have been accused

of successful deceit, whereas success in this line was exactly what her clever child went in for. She made even the true seem fictive, while Miriam's effort was to make the fictive true. Sherringham thought it an odd, unpromising stock (that of the Neville-Nugents) for a dramatic talent to have sprung from, till he reflected that the evolution was after all natural: the figurative impulse in the mother had become conscious, and therefore higher, through finding an aim, which was beauty, in the daughter. Likely enough the Hebraic Mr. Rooth, with his love of old pots and Christian altar-cloths, had supplied, in the girl's composition, the æsthetic element, the sense of form. In their visits to the theatre there was nothing that Mrs. Rooth more insisted upon than the unprofitableness of deceit, as shown by the most distinguished authors—the folly and degradation, the corrosive effect upon the spirit, of tortuous ways. Sherringham very soon gave up the futile task of piecing together her incongruous references to her early life and her family in England. He renounced even the doctrine that there was a residuum of truth in her claim of great relationships, for, existent or not, he cared equally little for her ramifications. The principle of this indifference was at bottom a certain desire to disconnect Miriam; for it was disagreeable not to be independent in dealing with her, and he could be fully so only if *she* were.

The early weeks of that summer (they went on indeed into August) were destined to establish themselves in his memory as a season of pleasant things. The ambassador went away, and Sherringham had to wait for his own holiday, which he did, during the hot days, contentedly enough, in spacious

halls, with a dim, bird-haunted garden. The official world, and most other worlds withdrew from Paris, and the Place de la Concorde, a larger, whiter desert than ever, became, by a reversal of custom, explorable with safety. The Champs Elysées were dusty and rural, with little creaking booths and exhibitions which made a noise like grasshoppers; the Arc de Triomphe threw its cool, sharp shadow for a mile; the Palais de l'Industrie glittered in the light of the long days; the cabmen, in their red waistcoats, dozed in their boxes; and Sheringham permitted himself a "pot" hat and rarely met a friend. Thus was Miriam still more disconnected, and thus was it possible to deal with her still more independently. The theatres on the boulevard closed, for the most part, but the great temple of the Rue de Richelieu, with an æsthetic responsibility, continued imperturbably to dispense examples of style. Madame Carré was going to Vichy, but she had not yet taken flight, which was a great advantage for Miriam, who could now solicit her attention with the consciousness that she had no engagements *en ville*.

"I make her listen to me—I make her tell me," said the ardent girl, who was always climbing the slope of the Rue de Constantinople, on the shady side, where in the July mornings there was a smell of violets from the moist flower-stands of fat, white-capped *bouquetières*, in the angles of doorways. Miriam liked the Paris of the summer mornings, the clever freshness of all the little trades and the open-air life, the cries, the talk from door to door, which reminded her of the south, where, in the multiplicity of her habitations, she had lived; and most of all the great amusement, or nearly, of her walk



the enviable baskets of the laundress, piled up with frilled and fluted whiteness—the certain luxury, she felt as she passed, with quick prevision, of her own dawn of glory. The greatest amusement perhaps was to recognize the pretty sentiment of earliness, the particular congruity with the hour, in the studied, selected dress of the little tripping women who were taking the day, for important advantages, while it was tender. At any rate she always brought with her from her passage through the town good-humour enough (with the penny bunch of violets that she stuck in the front of her dress) for whatever awaited her at Madame Carré's. She told Sherringham that her dear mistress was terribly severe, giving her the most difficult, the most exhausting exercises—showing a kind of rage for breaking her in.

“So much the better,” Sherringham answered; but he asked no questions and was glad to let the preceptress and the pupil fight it out together. He wanted, for the moment, to know as little as possible about them: he had been overdosed with knowledge that second day he saw them together. He would send Madame Carré her money (she was really most obliging), and in the meantime he was conscious that Miriam could take care of herself. Sometimes he remarked to her that she needn't always talk “shop” to him: there were times when he was very tired of shop—of hers. Moreover he frankly admitted that he was tired of his own, so that the restriction was not brutal. When she replied, staring: “Why, I thought you considered it as such a beautiful, interesting art!” he had no rejoinder more philosophic than “Well, I do; but there are moments when I'm sick of it, all the same.” At other

times he said to her : " Oh, yes, the results, the finished thing, the dish perfectly seasoned and served : not the mess of preparation—at least not always—not the experiments that spoil the material."

"I thought you thought just these questions of study, of the artistic education, as you have called it to me, so fascinating," the girl persisted. Sometimes she was very lucid.

"Well, after all I'm not an actor myself," Sherringham answered, laughing.

"You might be one if you were serious," said Miriam. To this her friend replied that Mr. Gabriel Nash ought to hear that ; which made her exclaim, with a certain grimness, that she would settle *him* and his theories some day. Not to seem too inconsistent—for it was cruel to bewilder her when he had taken her up to enlighten—Sherringham repeated over that for a man like himself the interest of the whole thing depended on its being considered in a large, liberal way, with an intelligence that lifted it out of the question of the little tricks of the trade, gave it beauty and elevation. Miriam let him know that Madame Carré held that there were no *little* tricks ; that everything had its importance as a means to a great end ; and that if you were not willing to try to *approfondir* the reason why in a given situation you should scratch your nose with your left hand rather than with your right, you were not worthy to tread any stage that respected itself.

"That's very well ; but if I must go into details read me a little Shelley," said the young man, in the spirit of a high *raffiné*.

"You are worse than Madame Carré ; you don't know

what to invent : between you you'll kill me ! " the girl declared. " I think there's a secret league between you to spoil my voice, or at least to weaken my wind, before I get it. But *à la guerre comme à la guerre !* How can I read Shelley, however, when I don't understand him ? "

" That's just what I want to make you do. It's a part of your general training. You may do without that, of course—without culture and taste and perception ; but in that case you'll be nothing but a vulgar *cabotine*, and nothing will be of any consequence." Sherringham had a theory that the great lyric poets (he induced her to read and recite as well long passages of Wordsworth and of Swinburne) would teach her many of the secrets of competent utterance, the mysteries of rhythm, the communicableness of style, the latent music of the language and the art of " composing " copious speeches and of keeping her wind in hand. He held in perfect sincerity that there was an indirect enlightenment which would be of the highest importance to her and to which it was precisely, by good fortune, in his power to contribute. She would do better in proportion as she had more knowledge—even knowledge that might appear to have but a remote connection with her business. The actor's talent was essentially a gift, a thing by itself, implanted, instinctive, accidental, equally unconnected with intellect and with virtue—Sherringham was completely of that opinion ; but it seemed to him no contradiction to consider at the same time that intellect (leaving virtue, for the moment, out of the question) might be brought into fruitful relation with it. It would be a larger thing if a better mind were projected upon it—without sacri-

ficing the mind. So he lent Miriam books which she never read (she was on almost irreconcilable terms with the printed page), and in the long summer days, when he had leisure, took her to the Louvre to admire the great works of painting and sculpture. Here, as on all occasions, he was struck with the queer jumble of her taste, her mixture of intelligence and puerility. He saw that she never read what he gave her, though she sometimes would have liked him to suppose so; but in the presence of famous pictures and statues she had remarkable flashes of perception. She felt these things, she liked them, though it was always because she had an idea she could use them. The idea was often fantastic, but it showed what an eye she had to her business. "I could look just like that, if I tried." "That's the dress I mean to wear when I do Portia." Such were the observations that were apt to drop from her under the suggestion of antique marbles or when she stood before a Titian or a Bronzino.

When she uttered them, and many others besides, the effect was sometimes irritating to Sherringham, who had to reflect a little to remember that she was no more egotistical than the histrionic conscience demanded. He wondered if there were necessarily something vulgar in the histrionic conscience—something condemned to feel only the tricky personal question. Wasn't it better to be perfectly stupid than to have only one eye open and wear forever, in the great face of the world, the expression of a knowing wink? At the theatre, on the numerous July evenings when the Comédie Française played the repertory, with exponents determined the more sparse and provincial audience should thrill and gape with the tradition,

her appreciation was tremendously technical and showed it was not for nothing she was now in and out of Madame Carré's innermost counsels. But there were moments when even her very acuteness seemed to him to drag the matter down, to see it in a small and superficial sense. What he flattered himself that he was trying to do for her (and through her for the stage of his time, since she was the instrument, and incontestably a fine one, that had come to his hand) was precisely to lift it up, make it rare, keep it in the region of distinction and breadth. However, she was doubtless right and he was wrong, he eventually reasoned : you could afford to be vague only if you hadn't a responsibility. He had fine ideas, but she was to do the acting, that is the application of them, and not he ; and application was always of necessity a sort of vulgarization, a smaller thing than theory. If some day she should exhibit the great art that it was not purely fanciful to forecast for her, the subject would doubtless be sufficiently lifted up and it wouldn't matter that some of the onward steps should have been lame.

This was clear to him on several occasions when she repeated or acted something for him better than usual : then she quite carried him away, making him wish to ask no more questions but only let her disembroil herself in her own fashion. In these hours she gave him fitfully but forcibly that impression of beauty which was to be her justification. It was too soon for any general estimate of her progress ; Madame Carré had at last given her an intelligent understanding, as well as a sore personal sense, of how bad she was. She had therefore begun on a new basis ; she had returned to the alphabet and the



drill. It was a phase of awkwardness, like the splashing of a young swimmer, but buoyancy would certainly come out of it. For the present there was for the most part no great alteration of the fact that when she did things according to her own idea they were not as yet, and seriously judged, worth the devil, as Madame Carré said ; and when she did them according to that of her instructress they were too apt to be a gross parody of that lady's intention. None the less she gave glimpses, and her glimpses made him feel not only that she was not a fool (that was a small relief), but that *he* was not.

He made her stick to her English and read Shakespeare aloud to him. Mrs. Rooth had recognized the importance of an apartment in which they should be able to receive so beneficent a visitor, and was now mistress of a small salon with a balcony and a rickety flower-stand (to say nothing of a view of many roofs and chimneys), a crooked waxed floor, an empire clock, an *armoire à glace* (highly convenient for Miriam's posturings), and several cupboard doors, covered over, allowing for treacherous gaps, with the faded magenta paper of the wall. The thing had been easily done, for Sherringham had said : " Oh, we must have a sitting-room for our studies, you know. I'll settle it with the landlady." Mrs. Rooth had liked his " we " (indeed she liked everything about him), and he saw in this way that she had no insuperable objection to being under a pecuniary obligation so long as it was distinctly understood to be temporary. That he should have his money back with interest as soon as Miriam was launched was a comfort so deeply implied that it only added to intimacy. The window stood open on the little balcony, and when the sun had left it

Sherringham and Miriam could linger there, leaning on the rail and talking, above the great hum of Paris, with nothing but the neighbouring tiles and tall tubes to take account of. Mrs. Rooth, in limp garments, much ungirdled, was on the sofa with a novel, making good her frequent assertion that she could put up with any life that would yield her these two articles. There were romantic works that Sherringham had never read, and as to which he had vaguely wondered to what class they were addressed—the earlier productions of M. Eugène Sue, the once-fashionable compositions of Madame Sophie Gay—with which Mrs. Rooth was familiar and which she was ready to peruse once more if she could get nothing fresher. She had always a greasy volume tucked under her while her nose was bent upon the pages in hand. She scarcely looked up even when Miriam lifted her voice to show Sherringham what she could do. These tragic or pathetic notes all went out of the window and mingled with the undecipherable concert of Paris, so that no neighbour was disturbed by them. The girl shrieked and wailed when the occasion required it, and Mrs. Rooth only turned her page, showing in this way a great æsthetic as well as a great personal trust.

She rather annoyed Sherringham by the serenity of her confidence (for a reason that he fully understood only later), save when Miriam caught an effect or a tone so well that she made him, in the pleasure of it, forget her parent was there. He continued to object to the girl's English, with the foreign patches which might pass in prose but were offensive in the recitation of verse, and he wanted to know why she could not speak like her mother. He had to do Mrs. Rooth the justice

of recognizing the charm of her voice and accent, which gave a certain richness even to the foolish things she said. They were of an excellent insular tradition, full both of natural and of cultivated sweetness, and they puzzled him when other indications seemed to betray her—to relegate her to the class of the simple dreary. They were like the reverberation of far-off drawing-rooms.

The connection between the development of Miriam's genius and the necessity of an occasional excursion to the country—the charming country that lies in so many directions beyond the Parisian *banlieue*—would not have been immediately apparent to a merely superficial observer; but a day, and then another, at Versailles, a day at Fontainebleau and a trip, particularly harmonious and happy, to Rambouillet, took their place in Sherringham's programme as a part of the legitimate indirect culture, an agency in the formation of taste. Intimations of the grand style, for instance, would proceed in abundance from the symmetrical palace and gardens of Louis XIV. Sherringham was very fond of Versailles, and went there more than once with the ladies of the Hôtel de la Garonne. They chose quiet hours, when the fountains were dry; and Mrs. Rooth took an armful of novels and sat on a bench in the park, flanked by clipped hedges and old statues, while her young companions strolled away, walked to the Trianon, explored the long, straight vistas of the woods. Rambouillet was vague and pleasant and idle; they had an idea that they found suggestive associations there; and indeed there was an old white château which contained nothing else. They found, at any rate, luncheon and, in the landscape, a

charming sense of summer and of little brushed French pictures.

I have said that in these days Sherringham wondered a good deal, and by the time his leave of absence was granted him this practice had engendered a particular speculation. He was surprised that he was not in love with Miriam Rooth, and he considered in moments of leisure the causes of his exemption. He had perceived from the first that she was a "nature," and each time she met his eyes the more vividly it appeared to him that her beauty was rare. You had to get the view of her face, but when you did so it was a splendid mobile mask. And the possessor of this high advantage had frankness and courage and variety and the unusual and the unexpected. She had qualities that seldom went together—impulses and shynesses, audacities and lapses, something coarse, popular and strong, all intermingled with disdains and languors and nerves. And then, above all, she was there, she was accessible, she almost belonged to him. He reflected ingeniously that he owed his escape to a peculiar cause—the fact that they had together a positive outside object. Objective, as it were, was all their communion; not personal and selfish, but a matter of art and business and discussion. Discussion had saved him and would save him further; for they would always have something to quarrel about. Sherringham, who was not a diplomatist for nothing; who had his reasons for steering straight and wished neither to deprive the British public of a rising star nor to change his actual situation for that of a conjugal *impresario*, blessed the beneficence, the salubrity, the pure exorcism of art. At the same

time, rather inconsistently and feeling that he had a completer vision than before of the odd animal the artist who happened to have been born a woman, he felt himself warned against a serious connection (he made a great point of the "serious,") with so slippery and ticklish a creature. The two ladies had only to stay in Paris, save their candle-ends and, as Madame Carré had enjoined, practise their scales : there were apparently no autumn visits to English country-houses in prospect for Mrs. Rooth.

Sherringham parted with them on the understanding that in London he would look as thoroughly as possible into the question of an engagement for Miriam. The day before he began his holiday he went to see Madame Carré, who said to him : "*Vous devriez bien nous la laisser.*"

"She has got something, then?"

"She has got most things. She'll go far. It is the first time I ever was mistaken. But don't tell her so—I don't flatter her; she'll be too puffed up."

"Is she very conceited?" Sherringham asked.

"*Mauvais sujet!*" said Madame Carré.

It was on the journey to London that he indulged in some of those questionings of his state which I have mentioned; but I must add that by the time he reached Charing Cross (he smoked a cigar, deferred till after the Channel, in a compartment by himself) it suddenly came over him that they were futile. Now that he had left the girl, a subversive, unpremeditated heart-beat told him—it made him hold his breath a minute in the carriage—that he had after all *not* escaped. He *was* in love with her : he had been in love with her from the first hour.



### XIII.

THE drive from Harsh to the Place, as it was called thereabouts, could be achieved by swift horses in less than ten minutes ; and if Mrs. Dallow's ponies were capital trotters the general high pitch of the occasion made it congruous that they should show their speed. The occasion was the polling-day, the hour after the battle. The ponies had worked, with all the rest, for the week before, passing and repassing the neat windows of the flat little town (Mrs. Dallow had the complacent belief that there was none in the kingdom in which the flower-stands looked more respectable between the stiff muslin curtains), with their mistress behind them in her low, smart trap. Very often she was accompanied by the Liberal candidate, but even when she was not the equipage seemed scarcely less to represent his pleasant sociable confidence. It moved in a radiance of ribbons and handbills and hand-shakes and smiles ; of quickened intercourse and sudden intimacy ; of sympathy which assumed without presuming and gratitude which promised without soliciting. But, under Julia's guidance the ponies pattered now, with no indication of a loss of freshness, along the firm, wide avenue which wound and curved, to make up in picturesque effect for not undulating, from the gates opening straight into the town to the Palladian mansion,

high, square, gray and clean, which stood, among parterres and fountains, in the centre of the park. A generous steed had been sacrificed to bring the good news from Ghent to Aix, but no such extravagance was after all necessary for communicating with Lady Agnes.

She had remained at the house, not going to the Wheat-sheaf, the Liberal inn, with the others; preferring to await in privacy, and indeed in solitude, the momentous result of the poll. She had come down to Harsh with the two girls in the course of the proceedings. Julia had not thought they would do much good, but she was expansive and indulgent now and she had liberally asked them. Lady Agnes had not a nice canvassing manner, effective as she might have been in the character of the high, benignant, affable mother—looking sweet participation but not interfering—of the young and handsome, the shining, convincing, wonderfully clever and certainly irresistible aspirant. Grace Dormer had zeal without art, and Lady Agnes, who during her husband's lifetime had seen their affairs follow the satisfactory principle of a tendency to defer to supreme merit, had never really learned the lesson that voting goes by favour. However, she could pray God if she couldn't flatter the cheesemonger, and Nick felt that she had stayed at home to pray for him. I must add that Julia Dallow was too happy now, flicking her whip in the bright summer air, to say anything so ungracious even to herself as that her companion had been returned in spite of his nearest female relatives. Besides, Biddy *had* been a rosy help: she had looked persuasively pretty, in white and pink, on platforms and in recurrent carriages, out of which she had

tossed, blushing and making people remember her eyes, several words that were telling for their very simplicity.

Mrs. Dallow was really too glad for any definite reflection, even for personal exultation, the vanity of recognizing her own large share of the work. Nick was in and he was beside her, tired, silent, vague, beflowered and beribboned, and he had been splendid from beginning to end, delightfully good-humoured and at the same time delightfully clever—still cleverer than she had supposed he could be. The sense that she had helped his cleverness and that she had been repaid by it, or by his gratitude (it came to the same thing), in a way she appreciated, was not triumphant and jealous; for the break of the long tension soothed her, it was as pleasant as an untied ligature. So nothing passed between them on their way to the house; there was no sound in the park but the happy rustle of summer (it seemed an applausive murmur) and the swift progress of the vehicle.

Lady Agnes already knew, for as soon as the result was declared Nick had despatched a man on horseback to her, carrying the figures on a scrawled card. He had been far from getting away at once, having to respond to the hubbub of acclamation, to speak yet again, to thank his electors individually and collectively, to chaff the Tories, to be carried hither and yon, and above all to pretend that the interest of the business was now greater for him than ever. If he said never a word after he put himself in Julia's hands to go home, perhaps it was partly because the consciousness began to glimmer within him that that interest had on the contrary now suddenly diminished. He wanted to see his mother

because he knew she wanted to see him, to fold him close in her arms. They had been open there for that purpose for the last half-hour, and her expectancy, now no longer an ache of suspense, was the reason of Julia's round face. Yet this very expectancy somehow made Nick wince a little. Meeting his mother was like being elected over again.

The others had not come back yet—Lady Agnes was alone in the large bright drawing-room. When Nick went in with Mrs. Dallow he saw her at the further end; she had evidently been walking to and fro, the whole length of it, and her tall, upright black figure seemed in possession of the fair vastness like an exclamation-point at the bottom of a blank page. The room, rich and simple, was a place of perfection as well as of splendour in delicate tints, with precious specimens of French furniture of the last century ranged against walls of pale brocade and here and there a small, almost priceless picture. George Dallow had made it, caring for these things and liking to talk about them (scarcely about anything else); so that it appeared to represent him still, what was best in his kindly, uniform nature—a friendly, competent, tiresome insistence upon purity and homogeneity. Nick Dormer could hear him yet, and could see him, too fat and with a congenital thickness in his speech, lounging there in loose clothes with his eternal cigarette. “Now, my dear fellow, *that's* what I call form: I don't know what you call it”—that was the way he used to begin. The room was full of flowers in rare vases, but it looked like a place of which the beauty would have had a sweet odour even without them.

Lady Agnes had taken a white rose from one of the

clusters and was holding it to her face, which was turned to the door as Nick crossed the threshold. The expression of her figure instantly told him (he saw the creased card that he had sent her lying on one of the beautiful bare tables) how she had been sailing up and down in a majesty of satisfaction. The inflation of her long, plain dress, the brightened dimness of her proud face were still in the air. In a moment he had kissed her and was being kissed, not in quick repetition, but in tender prolongation, with which the perfume of the white rose was mixed. But there was something else too—her sweet, smothered words in his ear: "Oh, my boy, my boy—oh, your father, your father!" Neither the sense of pleasure nor that of pain, with Lady Agnes (and indeed with most of the persons with whom this history is concerned), was a liberation of chatter; so that for a minute all she said again was: "I think of Sir Nicholas. I wish he were here;" addressing the words to Julia, who had wandered forward without looking at the mother and son.

"Poor Sir Nicholas!" said Mrs. Dallow, vaguely.

"Did you make another speech?" Lady Agnes asked.

"I don't know; did I?" Nick inquired.

"I don't know!" Mrs. Dallow replied, with her back turned, doing something to her hat before the glass.

"Oh, I can fancy the confusion, the bewilderment!" said Lady Agnes, in a tone rich in political reminiscence.

"It was really immense fun!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallow.

"Dear Julia!" Lady Agnes went on. Then she added: "It was you who made it sure."

"There are a lot of people coming to dinner," said Julia.



"Perhaps you'll have to speak again," Lady Agnes smiled at her son.

"Thank you; I like the way you talk about it!" cried Nick. "I'm like Iago: 'from this time forth I never will speak word!'"

"Don't say that, Nick," said his mother, gravely.

"Don't be afraid: he'll jabber like a magpie!" And Mrs. Dallow went out of the room.

Nick had flung himself upon a sofa with an air of weariness, though not of completely vanished cheer; and Lady Agnes stood before him fingering her rose and looking down at him. His eyes looked away from hers: they seemed fixed on something she couldn't see. "I hope you've thanked Julia," Lady Agnes dropped.

"Why, of course, mother."

"She has done as much as if you hadn't been sure."

"I wasn't in the least sure—and she has done everything."

"She has been too good—but *we've* done something. I hope you don't leave out your father," Lady Agnes amplified, as Nick's glance appeared for a moment to question her "*we*."

"Never, never!" Nick uttered these words perhaps a little mechanically, but the next minute he continued, as if he had suddenly been moved to think what he could say that would give his mother most pleasure: "Of course his name has worked for me. Gone as he is, he is still a living force." He felt a good deal of a hypocrite, but one didn't win a seat every day in the year. Probably indeed he should never win another.

"He hears you, he watches you, he rejoices in you," Lady Agnes declared.

This idea was oppressive to Nick—that of the rejoicing almost as much as of the watching. He had made his concession, but, with a certain impulse to divert his mother from following up her advantage, he broke out: “Julia’s a tremendously effective woman.”

“Of course she is!” answered Lady Agnes, knowingly.

“Her charming appearance is half the battle,” said Nick, explaining a little coldly what he meant. But he felt that his coldness was an inadequate protection to him when he heard his mother observe, with something of the same sapience—

“A woman is always effective when she likes a person.”

It discomposed him to be described as a person liked, and by a woman; and he asked abruptly: “When are you going away?”

“The first moment that’s civil—to-morrow morning. *You’ll* stay here, I hope.”

“Stay? What shall I stay for?”

“Why, you might stay to thank her.”

“I have everything to do.”

“I thought everything was done,” said Lady Agnes.

“Well, that’s why,” her son replied, not very lucidly. “I want to do other things—quite other things. I should like to take the next train.” And Nick looked at his watch.

“When there are people coming to dinner to meet you?”

“They’ll meet *you*—that’s better.”

“I’m sorry any one is coming,” Lady Agnes said, in a tone unencouraging to a deviation from the intensity of things. “I wish we were alone—just as a family. It would please Julia to-day to feel that we *are* one. Do stay with her to-morrow.”

“How will that do, when she’s alone?”

“She won’t be alone, with Mrs. Gresham.”

“Mrs. Gresham doesn’t count.”

“That’s precisely why I want you to stop. And her cousin, almost her brother: what an idea that it won’t do! Haven’t you stayed here before, when there has been no one?”

“I have never stayed much, and there have always been people. At any rate, now it’s different.”

“It’s just because it is different. Besides, it isn’t different, and it never was,” said Lady Agnes, more incoherent, in her earnestness, than it often happened to her to be. “She always liked you, and she likes you now more than ever, if you call *that* different!” Nick got up at this and, without meeting her eyes, walked to one of the windows, where he stood with his back turned, looking out on the great greenness. She watched him a moment and she might well have been wishing, while he remained gazing there, as it appeared, that it would come to him with the same force as it had come to herself (very often before, but during these last days more than ever), that the level lands of Harsh, stretching away before the window, the French garden, with its symmetry, its screens and its statues, and a great many more things, of which these were the superficial token, were Julia’s very own, to do with exactly as she liked. No word of appreciation or envy, however, dropped from the young man’s lips, and his mother presently went on: “What could be more natural than that after your triumphant contest you and she should have lots to settle and to talk about—no end of practical questions, no end of

business ? Aren't you her member, and can't her member pass a day with her, and she a great proprietor ? ”

Nick turned round at this, with an odd expression. “ *Her* member—am I hers ? ”

Lady Agnes hesitated a moment ; she felt that she had need of all her tact. “ Well, if the place is hers, and you represent the place—” she began. But she went no further, for Nick interrupted her with a laugh.

“ What a droll thing to ‘represent,’ when one thinks of it ! And what does *it* represent, poor torpid little borough, with its smell of meal and its curiously fat-faced inhabitants ? Did you ever see such a collection of fat faces, turned up at the hustings ? They looked like an enormous sofa, with the cheeks for the gathers and the eyes for the buttons.”

“ Oh, well, the next time you shall have a great town,” Lady Agnes replied, smiling and feeling that she *was* tactful.

“ It will only be a bigger sofa ! I’m joking, of course,” Nick went on, “ and I ought to be ashamed of myself. They have done me the honour to elect me, and I shall never say a word that’s not civil about them, poor dears. But even a new member may joke with his mother.”

“ I wish you’d be serious with your mother,” said Lady Agnes, going nearer to him.

“ The difficulty is that I’m two men ; it’s the strangest thing that ever was,” Nick pursued, bending his bright face upon her. “ I’m two quite distinct human beings, who have scarcely a point in common ; not even the memory, on the part of one, of the achievements or the adventures of the other. One man wins the seat—but it’s the other fellow who sits in it.”

“Oh, Nick, don’t spoil your victory by your perversity!” Lady Agnes cried, clasping her hands to him.

“I went through it with great glee—I won’t deny that: it excited me, it interested me, it amused me. When once I was in it I liked it. But now that I’m out of it again—”

“Out of it?” His mother stared. “Isn’t the whole point that you’re in?”

“Ah, now I’m only in the House of Commons.”

For an instant Lady Agnes seemed not to understand and to be on the point of laying her finger quickly to her lips with a “Hush!” as if the late Sir Nicholas might have heard the “only.” Then, as if a comprehension of the young man’s words promptly superseded that impulse, she replied with force: “You will be in the Lords the day you determine to get there.”

This futile remark made Nick laugh afresh, and not only laugh but kiss her, which was always an intenser form of mystification for poor Lady Agnes, and apparently the one he liked best to practise; after which he said: “The odd thing is, you know, that Harsh has no wants. At least it’s not sharply, not eloquently conscious of them. We all talked them over together, and I promised to carry them in my heart of hearts. But upon my word I can’t remember one of them. Julia says the wants of Harsh are simply the national wants—rather a pretty phrase for Julia. She means *she* does everything for the place; *she’s* really their member, and this house in which we stand is their legislative chamber. Therefore the *lacunæ* that I have undertaken to fill up are the national wants. It will be rather a job to rectify some of them, won’t it? I



don't represent the appetites of Harsh—Harsh is gorged. I represent the ideas of my party. That's what Julia says."

"Oh, never mind what Julia says!" Lady Agnes broke out, impatiently. This impatience made it singular that the very next words she uttered should be: "My dearest son, I wish to heaven you'd marry her. It would be so fitting now!" she added.

"Why now?" asked Nick, frowning.

"She has shown you such sympathy, such devotion."

"Is it for that she has shown it?"

"Ah, you might *feel*—I can't tell you!" said Lady Agnes, reproachfully.

Nick blushed at this, as if what he did feel was the reproach. "Must I marry her because you like her?"

"I? Why, we are *all* as fond of her as we can be."

"Dear mother, I hope that any woman I ever may marry will be a person agreeable not only to you, but also, since you make a point of it, to Grace and Biddy. But I must tell you this—that I shall marry no woman I am not unmistakably in love with."

"And why are you not in love with Julia—charming, clever, generous as she is?" Lady Agnes laid her hands on him—she held him tight. "My darling Nick, if you care anything in the world to make me happy, you'll stay over here to-morrow and be nice to her."

"Be nice to her? Do you mean propose to her?"

"With a single word, with the glance of an eye, the movement of your little finger"—and Lady Agnes paused, looking intensely, imploringly up into Nick's face—"in less time than

it takes me to say what I say now, you may have it all." As he made no answer, only returning her look, she added insistently, "You know she's a fine creature—you know she is!"

"Dearest mother, what I seem to know better than anything else in the world is that I love my freedom. I set it far above everything."

"Your freedom? What freedom is there in being poor? Talk of that when Julia puts everything that she possesses at your feet!"

"I can't talk of it, mother—it's too terrible an idea. And I can't talk of *her*, nor of what I think of her. You must leave that to me. I do her perfect justice."

"You don't, or you'd marry her to-morrow. You would feel that the opportunity is exquisitely rare, with everything in the world to make it perfect. Your father would have valued it for you beyond everything. Think a little what would have given *him* pleasure. That's what I meant when I spoke just now of us all. It wasn't of Grace and Biddy I was thinking—fancy!—it was of him. He's with you always; he takes with you, at your side, every step that you take yourself. He would bless devoutly your marriage to Julia; he would feel what it would be for you and for us all. I ask for no sacrifice, and he would ask for none. We only ask that you don't commit the crime—"

Nick Dormer stopped her with another kiss; he murmured: "Mother, mother, mother!" as he bent over her.

He wished her not to go on, to let him off; but the deep deprecation in his voice did not prevent her saying: "You

know it—you know it perfectly. All, and more than all that I can tell you, you know.”

He drew her closer, kissed her again, held her there as he would have held a child in a paroxysm, soothing her silently till it should pass away. Her emotion had brought the tears to her eyes; she dried them as she disengaged herself. The next moment, however, she resumed, attacking him again:

“For a public man she would be the ideal companion. She’s made for public life; she’s made to shine, to be concerned in great things, to occupy a high position and to help him on. She would help you in everything as she has helped you in this. Together there is nothing you couldn’t do. You can have the first house in England—yes, the first! What freedom *is* there in being poor? How can you do anything without money, and what money can you make for yourself—what money will ever come to you? That’s the crime—to throw away such an instrument of power, such a blessed instrument of good.”

“It isn’t everything to be rich, mother,” said Nick, looking at the floor in a certain patient way, with a provisional docility and his hands in his pockets. “And it isn’t so fearful to be poor.”

“It’s vile—it’s abject. Don’t I know?”

“Are you in such acute want?” Nick asked, smiling.

“Ah, don’t make me explain what you have only to look at to see!” his mother returned, as if with a richness of allusion to dark elements in her fate.

“Besides,” Nick went on, “there’s other money in the world than Julia’s. I might come by some of that.”

“Do you mean Mr. Carteret’s?” The question made him laugh, as her feeble reference, five minutes before, to the House of Lords had done. But she pursued, too full of her idea to take account of such a poor substitute for an answer : “Let me tell you one thing, for I have known Charles Carteret much longer than you, and I understand him better. There’s nothing you could do that would do you more good with him than to marry Julia. I know the way he looks at things and I know exactly how that would strike him. It would please him, it would charm him ; it would be the thing that would most prove to him that you’re in earnest. You need to do something of that sort.”

“Haven’t I come in for Harsh?” asked Nick.

“Oh, he’s very canny. He likes to see people rich. *Then* he believes in them—then he’s likely to believe more. He’s kind to you because you’re your father’s son ; but I’m sure your being poor takes just so much off.”

“He can remedy that so easily,” said Nick, smiling still. “Is being kept by Julia what you call making an effort for myself?”

Lady Agnes hesitated ; then : “You needn’t insult Julia !” she replied.

“Moreover, if I’ve *her* money, I sha’n’t want his,” Nick hinted.

Again his mother waited an instant before answering ; after which she produced : “And pray wouldn’t you wish to be independent?”

“You’re delightful, dear mother—you’re very delightful ! I particularly like your conception of independence. Doesn’t it



occur to you that at a pinch I might improve my fortune by some other means than by making a mercenary marriage or by currying favour with a rich old gentleman? Doesn't it occur to you that I might work?"

"Work at politics? How does that make money, honourably?"

"I don't mean at politics."

"What do you mean, then?" Lady Agnes demanded, looking at him as if she challenged him to phrase it if he dared. Her eye appeared to have a certain effect upon him, for he remained silent, and she continued: "Are you elected or not?"

"It seems a dream," said Nick.

"If you are, act accordingly and don't mix up things that are as wide asunder as the poles!" She spoke with sternness, and his silence might have been an admission that her sternness was wholesome to him. Possibly she was touched by it; at any rate, after a few moments, during which nothing more passed between them, she appealed to him in a gentler and more anxious key, which had this virtue to touch him, that he knew it was absolutely the first time in her life Lady Agnes had begged for anything. She had never been obliged to beg; she had got on without it and most things had come to her. He might judge therefore in what a light she regarded this boon for which, in her old age, she humbled herself to be a suitor. There was such a pride in her that he could feel what it cost her to go on her knees even to her son. He did judge how it was in his power to gratify her; and as he was generous and imaginative he was stirred and shaken as it came over him in a wave of figurative suggestion that he might make up



to her for many things. He scarcely needed to hear her ask, with a pleading wail that was almost tragic: "Don't you see how things have turned out for us; don't you know how unhappy I am—don't you know what a bitterness—?" She stopped for a moment, with a sob in her voice, and he recognized vividly this last tribulation, the unhealed wound of her bereavement and the way she had sunken from eminence to flatness. "You know what Percival is and the comfort I have from him. You know the property and what he is doing with it and what comfort I get from *that*! Everything's dreary but what you can do for us. Everything's odious, down to living in a hole with one's girls who don't marry. Grace is impossible—I don't know what's the matter with her; no one will look at her, and she's so conceited with it—sometimes I feel as if I could beat her! And Biddy will never marry, and we are three dismal women in a filthy house. What are three dismal women, more or less, in London?"

So, with an unexpected rage of self-exposure, Lady Agnes talked of her disappointments and troubles, tore away the veil from her sadness and soreness. It almost frightened Nick to perceive how she hated her life, though at another time it might have amused him to note how she despised her gardenless house. Of course it was not a country-house, and Lady Agnes could not get used to that. Better than he could do—for it was the sort of thing into which, in any case, a woman enters more than a man—she felt what a lift into brighter air, what a regilding of his sisters' possibilities, his marriage to Julia would effect for them. He couldn't trace the difference, but his mother saw it all as a shining picture. She made

the vision shine before him now, somehow, as she stood there like a poor woman crying for a kindness. What was filial in him, all the piety that he owed, especially to the revived spirit of his father, more than ever present on a day of such public pledges, was capable from one moment to the other of trembling into sympathetic response. He had the gift, so embarrassing when it is a question of consistent action, of seeing in an imaginative, interesting light anything that illustrated forcibly the life of another: such things effected a union with something in *his* life, and the recognition of them was ready to become a form of enthusiasm in which there was no consciousness of sacrifice—none scarcely of merit.

Rapidly, at present, this change of scene took place before his spiritual eye. He found himself believing, because his mother communicated the belief, that it was in his option to transform the social outlook of the three women who clung to him and who declared themselves dismal. This was not the highest kind of inspiration, but it was moving, and it associated itself with dim confusions of figures in the past—figures of authority and expectancy. Julia's wide kingdom opened out around him, making the future almost a dazzle of happy power. His mother and sisters floated in the rosy element with beaming faces, in transfigured safety. "The first house in England," she had called it; but it might be the first house in Europe, the first house in the world, by the fine air and the high humanities that should fill it. Everything that was beautiful in the place where he stood took on a more delicate charm; the house rose over his head like a museum of exquisite rewards, and the image of poor George

Dallow hovered there obsequious, as if to confess that he had only been the modest, tasteful forerunner, appointed to set it all in order and punctually retire. Lady Agnes's tone penetrated further into Nick's spirit than it had done yet, as she syllabled to him, supremely : " Don't desert us—don't desert us."

" Don't desert you?"

" Be great—be great," said his mother. " I'm old, I've lived, I've seen. Go in for a great material position. That will simplify everything else."

" I will do what I can for you—anything, everything I can. Trust me—leave me alone," said Nick Dormer.

" And you'll stay over—you'll spend the day with her?"

" I'll stay till she turns me out!"

His mother had hold of his hand again now ; she raised it to her lips and kissed it. " My dearest son, my only joy !" Then, " I don't see how you can resist her," she added.

" No more do I!"

Lady Agnes looked round the great room with a soft exhalation of gratitude and hope. " If you're so fond of art, what art is equal to all this? The joy of living in the midst of it—of seeing the finest works every day! You'll have everything the world can give."

" That's exactly what was just passing in my own mind. It's too much."

" Don't be selfish!"

" Selfish?" Nick repeated.

" Don't be unselfish, then. You'll share it with us."

" And with Julia a little, I hope," said Nick.

"God bless you!" cried his mother, looking up at him. Her eyes were detained by the sudden perception of something in his own that was not clear to her; but before she had time to ask for an explanation of it Nick inquired, abruptly—

"Why do you talk so of poor Biddy? Why won't she marry?"

"You had better ask Peter Sherringham," said Lady Agnes.

"What has he got to do with it?"

"How odd of you to ask, when it's so plain how she thinks of him that it's a matter of common chaff!"

"Yes, we've made it so, and she takes it like an angel. But Peter likes her."

"Does he? Then it's the more shame to him to behave as he does. He had better leave his actresses alone. That's the love of art, too!" mocked Lady Agnes.

"Biddy's so charming—she'll marry some one else."

"Never, if she loves him. But Julia will bring it about—Julia will help her," said Lady Agnes, more cheerfully. "That's what you'll do for us—that *she*'ll do everything!"

"Why then more than now?" Nick asked.

"Because we shall be yours."

"You are mine already."

"Yes, but *she* isn't. However, she's as good!" exulted Lady Agnes.

"She'll turn me out of the house," said Nick.

"Come and tell me when she does! But there she is—go to her!" And she gave him a push toward one of the windows

that stood open to the terrace. Mrs. Dallow had become visible outside; she passed slowly along the terrace, with her long shadow. "Go to her," Lady Agnes repeated—"she's waiting for you."

Nick went out with the air of a man who was as ready to pass that way as any other, and at the same moment his two sisters, freshly restored from the excitements of the town, came into the room from another quarter.

"We go home to-morrow, but Nick will stay a day or two," their mother said to them.

"Dear old Nick!" Grace ejaculated, looking at Lady Agnes.

"He's going to speak," the latter went on. "But don't mention it."

"Don't mention it?" said Biddy, staring. "Hasn't he spoken enough, poor fellow?"

"I mean to Julia," Lady Agnes replied.

"Don't you understand, you goose?" Grace exclaimed to her sister.



#### XIV.

THE next morning brought Nick Dormer many letters and telegrams, and his coffee was placed beside him in his room, where he remained until noon answering these communications. When he came out he learned that his mother and sisters had left the house. This information was given him by Mrs. Gresham, whom he found dealing with her own voluminous budget at one of the tables in the library. She was a lady who received thirty letters a day, the subject-matter of which, as well as of her punctual answers, in a hand that would have been "lady-like" in a manageress, was a puzzle to those who observed her.

She told Nick that Lady Agnes had not been willing to disturb him at his work to say good-bye, knowing she should see him in a day or two in town. Nick was amused at the way his mother had stolen off; as if she feared that further conversation might weaken the spell she believed herself to have wrought. The place was cleared, moreover, of its other visitors, so that, as Mrs. Gresham said, the fun was at an end. This lady expressed the idea that the fun was after all rather heavy. At any rate now they could rest, Mrs. Dallow and Nick and she, and she was glad Nick was going to stay for a little quiet. She liked Harsh best when it was not *en fête*: then one could see what a sympathetic old place it was. She hoped Nick was not dreadfully tired; she feared Julia was

completely done up. Mrs. Dallow, however, had transported her exhaustion to the grounds—she was wandering about somewhere. She thought more people would be coming to the house, people from the town, people from the country, and had gone out so as not to have to see them. She had not gone far—Nick could easily find her. Nick intimated that he himself was not eager for more people, whereupon Mrs. Gresham said, rather archly smiling :

“And of course you hate *me* for being here !” He made some protest, and she added : “But I’m almost a part of the house, you know—I’m one of the chairs or tables.” Nick declared that he had never seen a house so well furnished, and Mrs. Gresham said : “I believe there *are* to be some people to dinner : rather an interference, isn’t it ? Julia lives so in public. But it’s all for you.” And after a moment she added : “It’s a wonderful constitution.” Nick at first failed to seize her allusion—he thought it a retarded political reference, a sudden tribute to the great unwritten instrument by which they were all governed. He was on the point of saying : “The British ? Wonderful !” when he perceived that the intention of his interlocutress was to praise Mrs. Dallow’s fine robustness. “The surface so delicate, the action so easy, yet the frame of steel.”

Nick left Mrs. Gresham to her correspondence and went out of the house ; wondering as he walked whether she wanted him to do the same thing that his mother wanted, so that her words had been intended for a prick—whether even the two ladies had talked over their desire together. Mrs. Gresham was a married woman who was usually taken for a widow ;

mainly because she was perpetually "sent for" by her friends, and her friends never sent for Mr. Gresham. She came in every case and had the air of being *répandue* at the expense of dingier belongings. Her figure was admired—that is it was sometimes mentioned—and she dressed as if it was expected of her to be smart, like a young woman in a shop or a servant much in view. She slipped in and out, accompanied at the piano, talked to the neglected visitors, walked in the rain and, after the arrival of the post, usually had conferences with her hostess, during which she stroked her chin and looked familiarly responsible. It was her peculiarity that people were always saying things to her in a lowered voice. She had all sorts of acquaintances and in small establishments she sometimes wrote the *menus*. Great ones, on the other hand, had no terrors for her: she had seen too many. No one had ever discovered whether any one else paid her.

If Lady Agnes, in a lowered tone, had discussed with her the propriety of a union between the mistress of Harsh and the hope of the Dormers our young man could take the circumstance for granted without irritation and even with cursory indulgence: for he was not unhappy now and his spirit was light and clear. The summer day was splendid and the world, as he looked at it from the terrace, offered no more worrying ambiguity than a vault of airy blue arching over a lap of solid green. The wide, still trees in the park appeared to be waiting for some daily inspection, and the rich fields, with their official frill of hedges, to rejoice in the light which approved them as named and numbered acres. The place looked happy to Nick, and he was struck with its having a charm to which he had

perhaps not hitherto done justice ; something of the impression that he had received, when he was younger, from showy "views" of fine country-seats, as if they had been brighter and more established than life. There were a couple of peacocks on the terrace, and his eye was caught by the gleam of the swans on a distant lake, where there was also a little temple on an island ; and these objects fell in with his humour, which at another time might have been ruffled by them as representing the Philistine in ornament.

It was certainly a proof of youth and health on his part that his spirits had risen as the tumult rose and that after he had taken his jump into the turbid waters of a contested election he had been able to tumble and splash, not only with a sense of awkwardness but with a considerable capacity for the frolic. Tepid as we saw him in Paris he had found his relation to his opportunity surprisingly altered by his little journey across the Channel. He saw things in a new perspective and he breathed an air that excited him unexpectedly. There was something in it that went to his head—an element that his mother and his sisters, his father from beyond the grave, Julia Dallow, the Liberal party and a hundred friends were both secretly and overtly occupied in pumping into it. If he was vague about success he liked the fray, and he had a general rule that when one was in a muddle there was refreshment in action. The embarrassment, that is the revival of scepticism, which might produce an inconsistency shameful to exhibit and yet very difficult to conceal, was safe enough to come later : indeed at the risk of making our young man appear a purely whimsical personage I may hint that some such sickly glow

had even now begun to colour one quarter of his mental horizon.

I am afraid moreover that I have no better excuse for him than the one he had touched on in the momentous conversation with his mother which I have thought it useful to reproduce in full. He was conscious of a double nature; there were two men in him, quite separate, whose leading features had little in common and each of whom insisted on having an independent turn at life. Meanwhile if he was adequately aware that the bed of his moral existence would need a good deal of making over if he was to lie upon it without unseemly tossing, he was also alive to the propriety of not parading his inconsistencies, not letting his unrectified interests become a spectacle to the vulgar. He had none of that wish to appear complicated which is at the bottom of most forms of fatuity; he was perfectly willing to pass as simple; he only aspired to be continuous. If you were not really simple this presented difficulties; but he would have assented to the proposition that you must be as final as you can and that it contributes much to finality to consume the smoke of your inner fire. The fire was the great thing and not the chimney. He had no view of life which counted out the need of learning; it was teaching rather as to which he was conscious of no particular mission. He liked life, liked it immensely, and was willing to study the ways and means of it with a certain patience. He cherished the usual wise monitions, such as that one was not to make a fool of one's self and that one should not carry on one's technical experiments in public. It was because as yet he liked life in general better than it was clear to him that he liked any par-



ticular branch of it, that on the occasion of a constituency's holding out a cordial hand to him, while it extended another in a different direction, a certain bloom of boyhood that was on him had not resisted the idea of a match.

He rose to it as he had risen to matches at school, for his boyishness could take a pleasure in an inconsiderate show of agility. He could meet electors and conciliate bores and compliment women and answer questions and roll off speeches and chaff adversaries, because it was amusing and slightly dangerous, like playing football or ascending an Alp—pastimes for which nature had conferred on him an aptitude not so very different in kind from a gallant readiness on platforms. There were two voices which told him that all this was not really action at all, but only a pusillanimous imitation of it: one of them made itself fitfully audible in the depths of his own spirit and the other spoke, in the equivocal accents of a very crabbed hand, from a letter of four pages by Gabriel Nash. However, Nick acted as much as possible under the circumstances, and that was rectifying—it brought with it enjoyment and a working faith. He had not gone counter to the axiom that in a case of doubt one was to hold off; for that applied to choice, and he had not at present the slightest pretension to choosing. He knew he was lifted along, that what he was doing was not first-rate, that nothing was settled by it and that if there was essentially a problem in his life it would only grow tougher with keeping. But if doing one's sum to-morrow instead of to-day does not make the sum easier it at least makes to-day so.

Sometimes in the course of the following fortnight it

seemed to him that he had gone in for Harsh because he was sure he should lose; sometimes he foresaw that he should win precisely to punish him for having tried and for his want of candour; and when presently he did win he was almost frightened at his success. Then it appeared to him that he had done something even worse than not choose—he had let others choose for him. The beauty of it was that they had chosen with only their own object in their eye: for what did they know about his strange alternative? He was-rattled about so for a fortnight (Julia took care of that) that he had no time to think save when he tried to remember a quotation or an American story, and all his life became an overflow of verbiage. Thought retreated before increase of sound, which had to be pleasant and eloquent, and even superficially coherent, without its aid. Nick himself was surprised at the airs he could play; and often when the last thing at night he shut the door of his room he mentally exclaimed that he had had no idea he was such a mountebank.

I must add that if this reflection did not occupy him long, and if no meditation, after his return from Paris, held him for many moments, there was a reason better even than that he was tired or busy or excited by the agreeable combination of hits and hurrahs. That reason was simply Mrs. Dallow, who had suddenly become a still larger fact in his consciousness than active politics. She *was*, indeed, active politics; that is, if the politics were his, how little soever, the activity was hers. She had ways of showing she was a clever woman that were better than saying clever things, which only prove at the most that one would be clever if one could. The

accomplished fact itself was the demonstration that Mrs. Dallow could; and when Nick came to his senses after the proclamation of the victor and the cessation of the noise her figure was, of all the queer phantasmagoria, the most substantial thing that survived. She had been always there, passing, repassing, before him, beside him, behind him. She had made the business infinitely prettier than it would have been without her, added music and flowers and ices, a charm, and converted it into a social game that had a strain of the heroic. It was a garden-party with something at stake, or to celebrate something in advance, with the people let in. The concluded affair had bequeathed him not only a seat in the House of Commons, but a perception of what women may do in high embodiments, and an abyss of intimacy with one woman in particular.

She had wrapped him up in something, he didn't know what—a sense of facility, an overpowering fragrance—and they had moved together in an immense fraternity. There had been no love-making, no contact that was only personal, no vulgarity of flirtation: the hurry of the days and the sharpness with which they both tended to an outside object had made all that irrelevant. It was as if she had been too near for him to see her separate from himself; but none the less, when he now drew breath and looked back, what had happened met his eyes as a composed picture—a picture of which the subject was inveterately Julia and her ponies: Julia wonderfully fair and fine, holding her head more than ever in the manner characteristic of her, brilliant, benignant, waving her whip, cleaving the crowd, thanking people with

her smile, carrying him beside her, carrying him to his doom. He had not supposed that in so few days he had driven about with her so much; but the image of it was there, in his consulted conscience, as well as in a personal glow not yet chilled: it looked large as it rose before him. The things his mother had said to him made a rich enough frame for it, and the whole impression, that night, had kept him much awake.

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